

DN disabilitynow

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Campaign will fight for children's rights

BY SUNIL PECK

Hundreds of prominent disability figures are signing up to a new campaign* to prevent any disabled children in the UK undergoing the treatment given to the nine-year-old American girl, Ashley X.

It was launched after an article by Ashley's parents on their website sparked huge controversy in the UK last month, amid claims that the treatment was an abuse of her human rights.

Ashley (pictured), who is severely disabled with learning difficulties, was given hormone treatment, a hysterectomy and other surgery aimed at preventing her body developing, and so making it easier for her parents to care for her.

The disability charity Scope has placed adverts in national newspapers, including DN, calling on the government to provide adequate support for families to prevent such an abuse of disabled children's

human rights ever happening in the UK.

It described the treatment given to Ashley X as "drastic and degrading".

Bob Benson, Scope's executive director for community development, said: "If we are to prevent this abuse of human rights of disabled children in the future, the government must face up to the pressure families are under and increase the money and support available to them."

Among the leading disability organisations and disabled people to have already signed up to the campaign are: the UK Disabled People's Council, RADAR, Capability Scotland, the National Autistic Society, Disability Awareness in Action, Disability Equality in Education, Inclusion Scotland, actor and writer Mat Fraser and businessman Simon Stevens.

And a string of other disability organisations have criticised the treatment given to Ashley X.



[HTTP://ASHLEYTREATMENT.SPACES.LIVE.COM/BLOG](http://ashleytreatment.spaces.live.com/blog)

People First Self Advocacy, which is run by people with learning difficulties, said the treatment was "taking away her fundamental right to grow up" and a "complete" abuse of her human rights.

The Disability Rights Commission has also condemned the treatment.

A spokeswoman said: "This is unnecessary medical treatment to deal with what is essentially a social problem: the

poverty and lack of support faced by families with disabled children in the United States and Britain.

"Ashley's parents say they cannot afford paid carers to come to their home to support her and this is one of the reasons they give for the treatment, but no-one should have treatment that is of no benefit to them without their consent."

She said half of British families with disabled children live in poverty.

Simone Aspis, a spokeswoman for the UK Disabled People's Council, warned that the case was not a one-off and that healthcare treatment of disabled people was often used to suit carers and care workers, even though it wasn't in the person's own interest.

*To sign up to the campaign visit: www.scope.org.uk/childrensrights or text: "scope rights" with your name, contact details and email address to 60003

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'No regrets' in cannabis case

BY SUNIL PECK

DN CAMPAIGN



A woman with multiple sclerosis (MS) says she has no regrets about supplying cannabis to other people affected by the condition, despite being found guilty of conspiring to supply the drug and facing a possible prison sentence.

Lezley Gibson was due to be sentenced at Carlisle Crown Court along with her husband, Mark, and a friend, as DN went to press. The Gibsons produced more than 20,000 chocolate bars containing cannabis and sent them to people with MS, if they provided proof they had the condition.

Mrs Gibson said that before she started using cannabis, she was unable to see, talk, or use the right side of her body.

She added: "My only crime



Bittersweet chocolate: Lezley Gibson (right) with fellow campaigner Clare Hodges, who also has MS

is wanting to be well and help other people when there isn't anything else available."

Matthew Trainer, a spokesman for the MS Society, would not endorse the illegal use of cannabis, but said: "There are very, very few licensed alternatives, so it's important to keep pushing for further research into the use of cannabis extracts for the treatment of neuropathic pain."

He added: "There is a demand among people with

MS for anything that can help relieve neuropathic pain."

Alun Buffry, a spokesman for the Legalise Cannabis Alliance (LCA), said: "We are appalled that the law would allow such a conviction, because they haven't exactly hurt anybody; they've helped a large number of people."

Mr Buffry added that 69 people (as DN went to press) had signed a petition on the LCA's website implicating themselves as co-conspirators in the case.

On the cover: Disabled campaigners protesting in Afghanistan. A new United Nations human rights convention should help 650 million disabled people worldwide. See news focus, pages 16-17. Picture by Reuters

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'Appalling' care at long-stay hospital revealed by new report

BY PAUL CARTER

An investigation by the government's healthcare watchdog has uncovered a catalogue of neglect and abuse of people with learning difficulties at a long-stay hospital.

The report by the Healthcare Commission found there had been a "series of failings" by Sutton and Merton Primary Care NHS Trust at Orchard Hill and other facilities.

It said the trust failed to provide safe and adequate care, which promoted dependency rather than support. There was inadequate support for people with challenging behaviour, inappropriate use of restraint

and serious deficiencies in providing up-to-date, person-centred care plans.

Anna Walker, the commission's chief executive, said: "The standard of services at Sutton and Merton was simply not acceptable in the 21st century."

She said staff were "often not sufficiently trained or supported to provide adequate care".

The report comes just six months after the commission published a report on neglect and abuse of people with learning difficulties at Cornwall Partnership NHS Trust (DN, page 3, August 2006).

That report prompted a nationwide audit of up to 200 learning difficulties services in

the health sector. The findings will be released this year.

Kathryn Stone, chief executive of Voice UK, said the Sutton and Merton report had revealed "an appalling state of affairs", while Rick Henderson, director of Action for Advocacy, said it "amounts to a dossier of shame for the staff and managers involved".

Care services minister Ivan Lewis said actions instigated after the Cornwall report would help to prevent a reoccurrence of such abuse.

He said the government was "very much in favour" of transferring responsibility for the NHS's remaining learning difficulty services to local councils.

Job support programmes criticised by MPs

The government should do more to support disabled people in work before they lose their jobs, according to a critical report* by an influential group of MPs.

The public accounts committee report on the government's schemes to support disabled people to find and stay in work said access to work was the only programme that helped disabled people who already had jobs.

It also criticised the government's "array of overlapping provision rather than a streamlined, cohesive suite of services".

There are one million people

on incapacity benefit who want to work, but department for work and pensions schemes reached only 160,000 disabled people in 2004/05, it said.

It also found that the quality and value for money of the services provided "varies widely" among more than 500 providers working for Jobcentre Plus.

Liberal Democrat disability spokesman Danny Alexander said: "This report reveals the government's attempts to help disabled people back into work are failing."

And Jeremy Hunt, the Conservative shadow minister for disabled people, called the

report a "very powerful analysis of the waste in the system".

Anne McGuire, minister for disabled people, said the government was reviewing its programmes that help disabled people find and keep a job.

She said: "We intend to reduce the number of contracts and simplify our processes to increase efficiency and improve customer service."

* *Gaining and retaining a job: the Department for Work and Pensions' support for disabled people; for a copy, tel: 0870 242 2345 or visit: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmpubacc.htm*

BBC scores with disabled teen actors



A new, 10-part children's series about a wheelchair basketball team is coming to CBBC.

Comedy-drama *Desperados* features a cast of disabled actors, and stars Paralympian and TV presenter Ade Adepitan as a coach searching for new talent to help his team stay in the league.

He told DN: "TV represents a cross-section of society, the black and Asian communities, and the disabled community. There has been a lack of programmes with people with disabilities and a lack of role models."

But he said there was more to the show than disability. "What's more important is that

it's a good drama.

"The script is funny as well as being hard-hitting. It's a real rollercoaster ride."

He described his fellow actors, many of whom were wheelchair basketball players rather than professional actors, as "all really good, really enthusiastic".

He said critics' reactions so far have been positive.

"In the past, attempts to portray people with disabilities haven't been too good, so people were expecting it to be naff."

Desperados starts on Wednesday, 31 January, at 5.30pm on the CBBC channel, and will be coming to BBC2 in March.

Harassment fears for teens in adult psychiatric wards

Teenagers with mental health problems are being physically and sexually harassed after being placed on adult psychiatric wards because of a lack of beds, according to a new report*.

Some were cared for for up to a year by inexperienced staff, who had not undergone police checks, according to the report for the children's commissioner by charity YoungMinds.

And some of the 16 young people from England and Wales tracked by the report received little information about their treatment.

Care services minister Ivan Lewis said: "We agree that children should not be treated in adult psychiatric wards and we want to see this practice phased out where possible."

**Pushed into the shadows: young people's experiences of adult mental health facilities; for a copy, visit: www.childrenscommissioner.org*



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Lords victory over mental health bill

BY ELIZABETH CHOPPIN

Disability campaigners have welcomed a victory after peers voted to amend the government's controversial mental health bill.

During the committee stage of the bill, the House of Lords supported changes that would prohibit sectioning people who do not have impaired judgement and who have not committed an offence.

Paul Jenkins, of Rethink, said: "The scale of the government's defeat reflects the strength of opposition to its deeply unpopular plans for mental health law reform. We need mental health law that is fit for

purpose, not the current proposals, which are unfair and unworkable."

And Rowena Daw, of the Mental Health Alliance, congratulated the Lords for voting to end a "major inequality".

She said: "People with physical illnesses cannot be forced to take medical treatment if they have their full decision-making ability, and nor should those with a mental illness."

"The bill is in need of a complete overhaul. We hope that today's vote marks the start of that process in Parliament."

During the debate, junior health minister Lord Hunt

warned the amendment would "undermine the broad intent of the bill".

He said: "Some people whose mental disorder creates a great risk to themselves or others may nevertheless retain the ability to make unimpaired decisions about treatment."

"In the government's view, a condition concerning impaired decision-making could result in some patients going untreated and thereby harming themselves or others."

A Department of Health spokesman said the government would try to overturn the amendment when the bill returned to the Commons.

Scheme should speed up payments

A scheme that should speed up benefit payments has been launched in Scotland.

The pilot scheme will allow GPs to send information relating to disability living allowance and attendance allowance claims electronically.

Anne McGuire, minister for disabled people, said: "Strengthening the partnership between the Scottish NHS and the UK benefits system in this way should lead to a reduction in the length of time it takes to process applications and consequently disabled people getting their money quicker."

If successful, ministers will consider extending the scheme to cover other benefits across the whole of Scotland.



New ball: Bailey Gregory, eight, tries his hand at cricket at a new sports club for blind and visually-impaired children on Teesside, launched by Action for Blind People. Middlesbrough Actionnaires gives eight to 16-year-olds the chance to take part in sports like climbing, archery and swimming.

MPs reveal disability policies

The disability spokesmen for the two main opposition parties have outlined their policies to fellow MPs and peers.

Speaking at an all party parliamentary disability group meeting, Jeremy Hunt, for the Conservatives, said the government had "an enormous amount to get right" if independent living was to become a reality. He called again for a single assessment process. "I think we've had a lot of reform of legislation, but I don't think we've had any real reform of services offered to disabled people, in particular the assessment process."

Danny Alexander, for the Liberal Democrats, called on the government to invest more money in Pathways to Work.

And he said the government should work with employers to give them the confidence to employ disabled people.

He added: "We could end up with an army of [disabled] people ready to take up jobs, and if there aren't any employers willing to take them on, then there could well be another big disappointment around the corner."

Both Mr Hunt and Mr Alexander said the government should address the link between disability and poverty. They also emphasised the need to ensure that disability issues were taken seriously when the DRC was replaced by the Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

In brief

Long wait for hearing aids
Up to half a million deaf and hard of hearing people are waiting to be seen by the NHS because they do not have modern, suitable hearing aids.

The estimate by the RNID comes after a three-year scheme, under which the charity joined forces with the Department of Health in an attempt to reduce costs and waiting times for people trying to obtain digital hearing aids. But patients are waiting to be assessed for digital hearing aids for up to five years, according to research by MP Grant Shapps.

Cash for medicine slammed

People with mental health problems who were paid between £5 and £15 per injection were more likely to take their medication, a study* in the *Psychiatric Bulletin* found.

But 42 per cent of mental health outreach workers questioned as part of the study raised ethical concerns about the scheme, and the UK Disabled People's Council said it "undermines the therapeutic relationship between patient and doctor".

*Money for medication: financial incentives to improve medication in assertive outreach, visit: www.rcpsych.ac.uk

Utility sites fail on access

Most websites of utility suppliers are inaccessible to disabled users, according to a report* by the computing and disability charity AbilityNet.

Of ten electricity and gas suppliers tested, only two, Scottish & Southern and USwitch, were given a three-star accessibility rating, the rest receiving only one or two. A three-star rating signifies a basic level of accessibility.

* www.abilitynet.org.uk/web

Sight loss preventable

Thousands of people with glaucoma risk losing their sight because they are not taking their medication, a new report* warned.

The RNIB said people with the condition need to take eye drops for the rest of their lives.

Barbara McLaughlan, of RNIB, said: "Nobody in the UK should be losing their sight to glaucoma anymore. Yet sadly people continue to, and often it's because patients have no symptoms and so simply stop taking the drops."

*Don't blame the patient! for a copy, tel: 0845 766 9999 or visit: www.rnib.org.uk

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Mums lobby for blue badge extension



The mothers of two disabled toddlers have lobbied MPs at Westminster to change the rules regarding blue badges.

Helen Grindrod's daughter Mia (pictured), who is nearly two, and Kelli-Ann Rushton's daughter Jessica, who is 11 months old, both have hip dysplasia, which requires them to wear heavy casts.

Their mums want a change in the legislation that currently only allows blue badges to be issued to children over two, and have launched a petition*.

Mrs Grindrod said: "There are many other parents in our position. Most children are walking independently by the age of two and there needs to be a temporary badge made available."

An extension was recommended by the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee's review of the blue badge scheme in 2002, but the government has yet to change the law.

In 2005, the Department for Transport (DfT) said it was "finalising" draft regulations for giving temporary badges to children under two who require bulky medical equipment to be carried with them.

A DfT spokeswoman said it will consult on extending the scheme as part of a package of other changes.

Jeremy Hunt MP, shadow minister for disabled people, has tabled an early day motion with Mrs Grindrod's MP, Maria Miller, calling on the government to act. Mr Hunt said: "The fact that the government has again stalled on changing regulations to allow those with young disabled children access to a badge is shameful."

"We will be doing everything we can to ensure that the government acts on this issue rather than simply making promises that they never implement."

*www.ipetitions.com/petition/blue_badge

New school code targets unfair admissions

A new mandatory school admissions code should give disabled and disadvantaged children a fair chance for a place at their preferred school.

The code*, which comes into force at the end of this month, aims to stop unfair admissions practices in all maintained schools, including comprehensives, academies and boarding schools.

It places a legal duty on local councils and admissions authorities to ban practices such as giving priority to children whose parents make a financial contribution.

It also forbids the use of rules that can discriminate against certain groups of children when the school is oversubscribed.

And it requires schools to have set arrangements for chil-

dren who need a place outside the normal admission round, building on existing duties giving "top priority" to children in care and those with a statement of special educational needs (SEN), even if the school is full.

The code also outlines new enforcement procedures and parents' rights to object to what they believe is unlawful or discriminatory.

Beth Reed, policy officer for the National Autistic Society, said: "We certainly welcome the code as an added protection for children with SEN. But discrimination often occurs at an earlier stage, in a more informal way. However, it would be quite difficult to deal with that in this code of practice."

*For a copy, tel: 0870 000 2288 or visit: www.dfes.gov.uk/sacode

Care crisis deepens

BY PAUL CARTER

Disabled and older people in England are increasingly having to find and pay for their own care, according to a "bleak" new report published by the government's care watchdog.

The Commission for Social Care Inspection report* says that, despite spending more, local councils are tightening the rules on who qualifies for state-funded care.

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) said millions of families were now at "breaking point" because of the threadbare state of services (DN, January, page 5).

And Andy Rickell, executive

director for diversity, politics and planning at Scope, called on the government to "step in to put a stop to this escalating crisis".

He said: "Disabled people should not be forced to rely on family and friends for essential support."

The report says that, as councils move towards only providing support to people with needs judged to be "critical", those with low or moderate needs could be forced to "do without" until their situation deteriorates enough for them to qualify for care. It also highlights dwindling levels of respite care.

The DRC said: "The report paints a bleak picture of

increasing demand for support against the backdrop of ever tightening criteria for getting it.

"The job of keeping many families together today rests on the shoulders of an informal army of relations and friends, which includes thousands of children who provide over 50 hours of care a week. In a developed society, this is nothing short of a disgrace."

The report also reveals that use of direct payments is rising, although they only account for £1 in every £100 of social care expenditure by councils.

*The State of Social Care in England 2005/06; for a copy, tel: 0870 240 7535 or visit: www.csci.org.uk

Renewed concerns over welfare reform

Concerns about the effects of welfare reform plans on disabled people have surfaced again during a parliamentary debate.

The welfare reform bill received its third reading last month in the House of Commons.

Danny Alexander, disability spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, called for an annual report to track the progress of the new personal capability assessment (PCA), which will decide eligibility for benefits.

Mr Alexander said details of the computer programme used

for assessments should be scrutinised by independent groups.

He added: "Unless there has been proper and rigorous testing, it will be impossible to know whether the new arrangement will work better or less well in practice than the current system."

Jim Murphy, minister for employment and welfare reform, said current testing of the PCA was a "work in progress".

After the debate, Paul Treloar, director of policy and services for Disability Alliance, said he was concerned about

funding for the roll-out of Pathways to Work and how it might be affected by the Treasury's upcoming comprehensive spending review.

He said: "It still feels like people are going to be denied benefits because the test has been made more difficult. People who would have passed (and received benefits) are now failing."

The bill was due for another reading in the House of Lords at the end of January.

*For a transcript of the debate, visit: www.parliament.uk

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Concerns over records failure

Adult protection charities have accused the Home Office of a "giant breach of trust" over its failure to pass details of 27,500 criminal offences committed by Britons abroad to the police.

Voice UK, the Ann Craft Trust and Respond said the failure could have led to schools and care organisations employing killers or rapists. Home secretary John Reid admitted that the files had not been recorded on

the national police database.

The Criminal Records Bureau is checking whether any offenders were allowed to work with vulnerable adults or children.

Deborah Kitson, of the Ann Craft Trust, said: "This gross omission may potentially give the opportunity to many people with previous convictions to gain employment without being checked. This must be rectified as a matter of priority."

MP boosts fuel campaign

BY SUNIL PECK

DN CAMPAIGN



A Liberal Democrat MP has joined the campaign to extend winter fuel payments to severely disabled people under 60, by introducing an early day motion (EDM) in parliament.

Greg Mulholland, MP for Leeds North West, tabled the EDM in December after a visit from a disabled constituent to his surgery.

Matthew Pinder, 21, told Mr Mulholland that he relies on

borrowing money from relatives to pay his heating bills, and wears several layers of clothing to keep warm in his house.

Mr Mulholland said: "It's extraordinary that this gap in provision exists at the same time as people over 60 get it regardless of the financial situation they are in."

He added: "When I raised this in question time in oral questions, the minister was really quite jumpy about the situation."

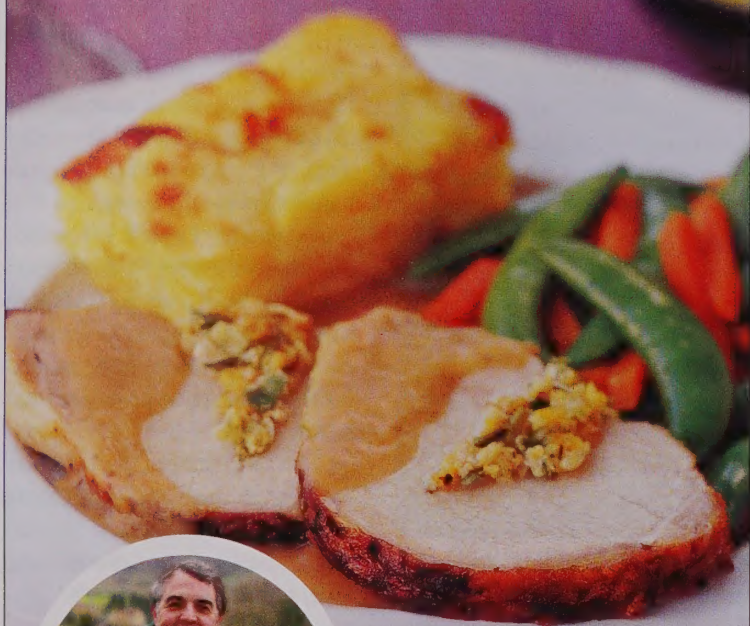
"I think they are realising that at the moment the government policy is failing people,

although of course they are not acknowledging that publicly."

Roger Berry, Labour MP for Kingswood, who has tabled several similar EDMs in the past, has signed Mr Mulholland's EDM but said it was "not very specific about who should be eligible for winter fuel payments".

He plans to propose an amendment, specifying that payments should be extended to people on the middle and higher rate of the care component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or the higher rate of the mobility component.

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Paper backs bays

DN CAMPAIGN



A Scottish national newspaper has launched a Baywatch-style campaign to stamp out the abuse of disabled parking bays.

The Access All Areas campaign began in support of MSP Jackie Baillie's push to make it illegal for non-badge holders to park in disabled parking bays in Scotland.

Allan Rennie, editor of the *Sunday Mail**, told DN: "Disabled parking spaces aren't really taken seriously and we wanted to highlight the problem."

Mr Rennie also spoke of the importance of stiffer fines for badge misuse, naming and shaming perpetrators, and raising awareness.

*www.sundaymail.co.uk



Going swimmingly: Swimmer Richard Hudson, who was presented with his MBE for services to disabled sport in December, is believed to be the first person with Down's syndrome to receive the honour. Ron Marks, mayor of Richard's home town of Melton, presented him with a photograph of himself in action to mark the occasion.

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Remploy pay talks delayed

Union officials have criticised an "unacceptable" delay in pay negotiations for Remploy workers.

The negotiations were due to start in November, but in December unions accused Anne McGuire, minister for disabled people, and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), of deliberately stalling the process.

But a DWP spokesman said the hold-up was due to Remploy having failed to submit the necessary information.

He said: "Now we have it we can work towards finalising a pay offer to the trade unions."

Phil Davies, secretary of the Remploy Trade Union Consortium, said they presented their pay claim last September, calling for a rise of 3.9 per cent.

Meanwhile, Ian Russell, ex-chief executive of Scottish Power, has been appointed to chair Remploy. Mr Davies said the unions will try to work with him. "We have this glass ceiling which disabled people can't move beyond. We're hoping this man will listen to us," he said.

Outcry over proposed post office closures

BY SUNIL PECK

Disability organisations have condemned government proposals to close around 2,500 of the UK's 14,300 post offices, both in urban and rural locations.

Alistair Darling, secretary of state for trade and industry, said some services for "small, remote communities" would be transferred to 500 shops, village halls, community centres, pubs and travelling mobile vans.

The government also hopes to invest up to £1.7 billion over five years to support the network, if given European Union approval.

But he told parliament the current network was unsustain-

able because four million fewer people use post offices each week than two years ago, and instead use emails, texts, direct debits and the internet. His department is now consulting on its plans*.

Andy Rickell, executive director for diversity, politics and planning at Scope, said closures could deprive disabled and older people of social interaction with non-disabled people in their community.

He added: "For many disabled people the convenience of having a post office in their town or village is essential for managing direct payments and benefits."

Arthritis Care's director of public affairs, Rachel

Haynes, said: "Those people whose arthritis impairs mobility will find they may not easily access more distant services – so they may face added cost and added trouble and stress in getting replacement services elsewhere."

Disability Wales communications manager, Penni Bestic, said: "If they are transferred to a local pub, will it have physical access? Will it have the same commitment to the local community as a post office? Will the opening times be convenient?"

*Visit: www.dti.gov.uk/consultations/page36024.html
For alternative formats, contact Phil Nash, tel: 020 7215 5049 or email: phil.nash@dti.gsi.gov.uk



Clear success: Eli Joseph, who is blind, could not use his garden in Ladbroke Grove, west London, after it became overgrown and attracted piles of litter. Police community support officer Irene Scott arranged for the garden to be cleared by charity Sixty Plus, with support from Kensington and Chelsea council.

Minister chooses segregation for son

Ex-education secretary Ruth Kelly has been criticised over her decision to take her disabled son out of a mainstream state school and send him to a £15,000-a-year special school.

Critics said the communities secretary's move contradicts government policy to support children with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

Tara Flood, director at the Alliance for Inclusive Education, said: "We accept that there is still some way to go before all children can be fully included in

mainstream provision.

"However, there is little chance of the government's policy...succeeding whilst senior government ministers seek out segregated education for their children."

Mrs Kelly defended her decision, which she said was made following professional advice suggesting her son, who reportedly has dyslexia, needed "specific specialist support".

She added: "He will attend this school for a couple of years before he begins at a state secondary school."

Training guidelines for key professions ignore DDA

Guidelines which determine whether people can train and work as teachers, nurses and social workers are likely to fall foul of anti-discrimination laws, according to a review* commissioned by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC).

The review found there was often no recognition of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in regulations governing training and entry to the professions, even though they were

compiled after the DDA became law in 1995. The review is part of a DRC investigation into the barriers facing disabled people pursuing careers as teachers, nurses and social workers. A final report is due this summer.

Bert Massie, chairman of the DRC, said: "Our investigation has uncovered over 70 separate regulations and pieces of guidance across these sectors, yet the overwhelming majority of them take no account of the DDA.

"This means that despite the minefield of regulations governing teaching, nursing and social work, disabled people are in severe danger of experiencing discrimination, both at the point of entry when they undertake training and also later on, once they start working."

*An analysis of the statutory and regulatory frameworks and cases relating to fitness standards in nursing, teaching and social work; www.drc-gb.org

The role of the lawyer in birth injury litigation

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It is a big step for a parent to ring for that initial discussion regarding their child's claim. There are occasions when events around birth can explain their child's cerebral palsy. In most cases, cerebral palsy is caused by unidentified events occurring well before birth.

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- The baby was particularly unwell in the neo-natal period particularly with evidence of fitting.

Funding is a concern for most families, but probably should not be. Legal Aid is available and is assessed on the child's means, not the parents'.

The litigation process begins with collating medical records and obtaining independent expert medical opinion. The obstetric notes are examined by an obstetrician and a midwife. To bring a successful claim it is not sufficient to show simply that wrong decisions were taken. We need to show that no responsible obstetrician/midwife would have taken the decisions that were taken. If we can identify

substandard care we then need to establish the link with cerebral palsy

Once the reports are available the family will meet with the experts and our barrister. If we agree that the case is strong enough, court proceedings then start.

If liability is established there is still much to do to calculate the award. The modern approach is to use a lump sum for capital costs. Ongoing future costs are often met by annual payments.

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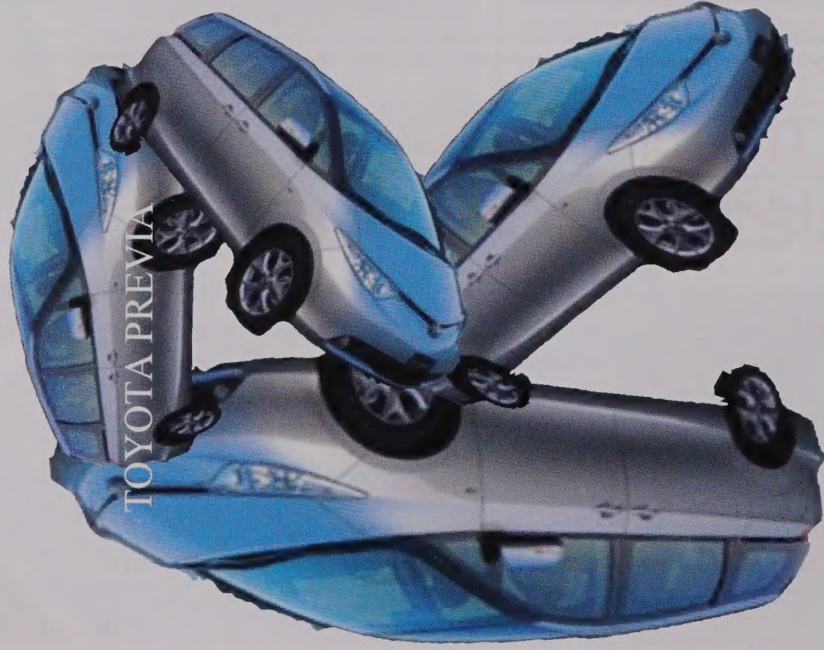
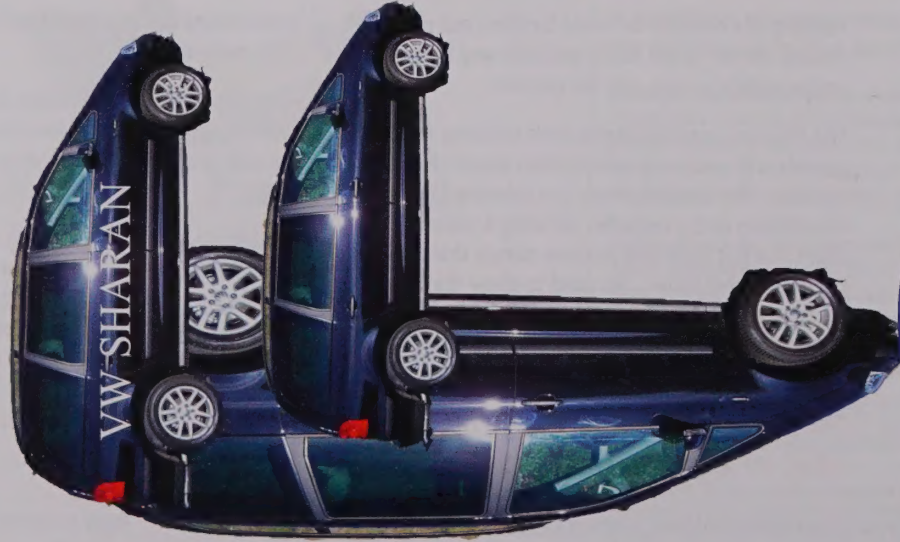
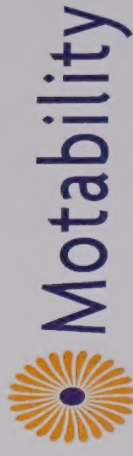


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Anger over charge for airport help

BY PAUL CARTER

Some disabled people are being forced to pay up to £40 for assistance at airports when they travel with a leading tour operator.

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) branded the policy of Thomson Holidays' airline, Thomsonfly, "deplorable". Thomsonfly requires anyone requesting assistance at check-in to produce either a blue parking badge or doctor's letter. Many doctors charge between £25-40 for such a letter.

Thomsonfly claims it is not a new policy, but Audrey Barker, of Willingdon, East Sussex, who booked a holiday to Malta for later this month, said: "Last year I travelled with Thomson to the same hotel, but this year they insisted on a doctor's certificate."

"I have always had assistance

at the airport when I've needed it and been able to go anywhere. Up until now I've had no problem with any other airline."

Will Bee, the DRC's transport director, said: "This is deplorable. Thomson are putting unnecessary barriers in the way of many disabled people."

"They are also running the risk of breaching the Disability Discrimination Act and probably the new EU regulation."

A Thomsonfly spokeswoman said: "When requesting special assistance at the airport parking or at check-in, Thomsonfly requires disabled passengers to produce their disabled badge number in order to validate that they need this assistance. If not then they must provide a doctor's note stating their specific disability and requirements."

She declined to comment further.



They're history: Young disabled people (left to right) David Hogan, Katy Capaldi, Andrew Raynor, and Paul Christian, are taking part in a Heritage Lottery-funded project, charting the history of disability in the London borough of Camden. They will create a public exhibition and booklet based on interviews with disabled people.

Diversity good for business

Businesses with a diverse workforce attract more business, according to new research.

The Jobcentre Plus research revealed that more than half of customers would be more likely to use a business that employed people who were disabled, older, or from ethnic minorities.

Four fifths of respondents felt the existence of a diversity policy in businesses was important.

Chief executive of Jobcentre Plus, Lesley Strathie, said: "This research proves to employers that being committed to diversity is not a business choice, but a business imperative."

"Customers and employees want to shop and work in environments which reflect their local communities."

Nick Bason, information and policy manager at the Employers' Forum on Disability, said: "There are commercial, professional and strategic benefits for a company in employing a diverse workforce."

"A company that can understand difference is much more likely to be able to understand the diverse needs of their customers...being confident in engaging with diversity is not only the right thing to do, it can give a significant commercial advantage."

Over half (58 per cent) of employers claimed to already employ a varied workforce, with 100,000 disabled people starting work last year through Jobcentre Plus.

Disabled children living away from home need advocates, says charity

All disabled children living away from home should have access to an independent advocate, according to a new campaign.

The Children's Society says there are more than 13,000 disabled children placed away from home, many vulnerable to intimidation, bullying and demeaning treatment. But only one in 20 has had access to an independent advocate.

The Children's Society's

strategy director, Penny Nicholls, said: "Every child deserves a good childhood, and disabled children placed away from home should have access to an independent advocate to safeguard this entitlement."

The charity is lobbying Beverley Hughes, minister for children, to ensure disabled children have a legal right to advocacy, which would help them express their views and support them

with decisions that affect their lives. The government is reviewing its support for children placed away from home, following its Care Matters green paper.

A Department for Education and Skills spokesman said: "We already agree the role of independent advocates has huge potential for children in care, including disabled children, as a source of encouragement, advice and support."

"That is why we believe that children placed away from home should have access to advocacy support, particularly disabled children, who we know are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect."

Margaret Kennedy, a child protection and disability consultant, said: "I think it's an excellent idea. It's another strand in the care of disabled children living away from home."

Mum wins ruling in care case

The mother of a disabled child has won the right to have a landmark employment case that could affect millions of unpaid carers heard by the European Court of Justice.

Sharon Coleman, who worked for a London solicitors firm, claims her employers refused to allow her flexible working conditions to care for her son.

The case, supported by the Disability Rights Commission, centres around the interpretation of the European Union's equal treatment directive and its impact on UK disability legislation.

Although not disabled herself, Ms Coleman's lawyers argue that the directive protects her from unfair treatment due to her role as a carer, as it does in cases of discrimination involving race or sexual orientation.

The DRC wants such cases of "associated discrimination" clearly covered by UK law.



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Massie knighted in New Year's honours

BY PAUL CARTER

This year's New Year's honours list was filled with disabled people from across the worlds of human rights, academia, arts and sport.

Bert Massie, chairman of the Disability Rights Commission since its launch in 2000, was knighted for his services to disabled people. His knighthood follows an OBE in 1984 and a CBE in 2000.

He said: "While it is the nature of the honours system that awards are given to individuals, in practice the knighthood is also in recognition of the wide range of people it has been my privilege to work with – at the Disability Rights Commission and more generally – in helping to bring about rights and justice for disabled people."

Meanwhile, Michelle Chinery, co-chair of the Learning Disability Task Force, said she was "overwhelmed" to receive an OBE for services to disabled people.

She said: "It is essential people with learning disabilities stand up and speak up

about what they want and need in their everyday lives. Equality is what I believe in passionately."

Peter Beresford, professor of social policy at Brunel University, was also awarded an OBE. He said: "At a time when there is still so much stigma attached to mental health service-users, it's really nice that there can be some recognition of what we can contribute."

After standing down late last year following six years as chief executive of RADAR, Kate Nash said she was "thrilled" and "honoured" to be awarded an OBE for RADAR's work in the field of justice for disabled people.

Dr Richard Light, director of research for Disability Awareness in Action, who spent five years working on the new UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, also receives an OBE.

Other disabled people to be recognised with OBEs include the percussionist Evelyn Glennie and dance pioneer Celeste Dandeker-Arnold*.

And an MBE was awarded to disabled water-skier Jacqueline Stimpson, from Middlesex, for services to disabled sport.

Among the non-disabled people in the list recognised for their work in the disability field, Jo Williams, chief executive of Mencap, was made a dame for her services to people with learning difficulties.

She said: "I hope that I can take advantage of this great honour to further promote the interests of people with a learning disability and their families and carers."

Margaret Cooper, chair of the Independent Living Funds (ILF), was awarded a CBE, Robert Banner will receive an OBE for his work as chair of the mental health charity Rethink, and Sue Wolstenholme, director of the British Tennis Foundation, also received an OBE.

*See profile, page 22

Pictured clockwise from top: Bert Massie, Peter Beresford, Evelyn Glennie, Richard Light and Kate Nash



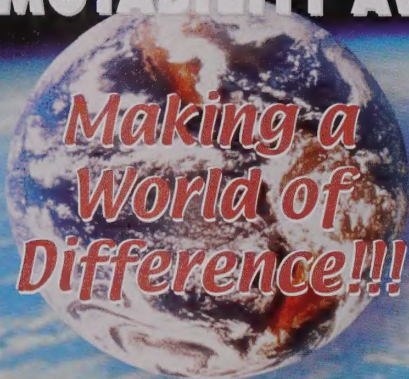
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The 21 for '25

BY IVY BROADHEAD

The government has announced the names of all but one of the 22 disabled people who will make up its new advisory network.

The members of Equality 2025 – the UK Advisory Network on Disability Equality – have a range of ages, backgrounds and experience.

The network aims to provide disabled people with a direct link with government, and help develop policies and services for disabled people.

Its members will work with the government towards achieving equality by 2025, an aim set out in the prime minister's strategy unit report, *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*.

Here are the 21 members named in December.

Haji Saghir Alam OBE



Haji has a legal and business background, plus extensive knowledge of diversity and equality issues. He is lead commissioner for partnership and capacity building at the DRC.

Simone Aspis



Simone is campaigns worker for the UK Disabled People's Council, secretary of the Alliance for Inclusive Education and disability spokesperson for the Green Party.

Prabhat Barot



Prabhat was originally a dentist but he retrained after experiencing mental health problems. He has worked in administration, IT and adult education and literacy work.

Michelle Daley



A disability equality trainer, consultant and campaigner, Michelle has worked with national and international organisations promoting policies on equality and diversity.

Nick Danagher



Nick developed and managed independent living schemes, and became executive director of the National Centre for Independent Living. He is now a freelance consultant on disability equality issues.

Clenton Farquharson



Clenton was a founding director of Gallant 2000, an enterprise specialising in equality, diversity and inclusion, based in the Midlands.

Tara Flood



Tara has been a disability and human rights activist for the last decade. In 2006, she became director of the Alliance for Inclusive Education.

Shelley Franklin



Shelley has 15 years' experience promoting equality and diversity and raising awareness of issues relating to disabled lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Miro Griffiths



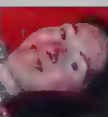
Student Miro Griffiths has fought for disability equality by promoting disability awareness to young people and as a chair of Whizz-Kidz.

Kirsten Hearn



Kirsten is chair of the equal opportunities and diversity board of the Metropolitan Police Authority. She runs an empowerment coaching and training consultancy.

Rowen Jade



Rowen has worked for the Alliance for Inclusive Education and several centres for inclusive living. She also pioneered a personal assistance support scheme in Bristol. She is now a freelance consultant.

Eleanor Thoe Lisney



Eleanor is an information specialist who has contributed as a

disabled professional on web usability and accessibility, as well as the importance of universal and inclusive design.

Dave McCormick



Dave is an education officer for the City of York Council's SEN service, and leads projects promoting independent living. He also supports educational providers as a disability equality trainer.

Sarah Newman



Originally a reporter, Sarah retrained as an advocate, representing disabled people in government tribunals. She now works for Brent Council, helping disabled people access improved life chances.

Andy Rickell



As executive director for diversity, politics and planning at Scope, Andy has driven forward the employment of disabled people, as well as a campaign to challenge disablism.

Richard Rieser



Richard is director of Disability Equality in Education and vice-chair of the Council for Disabled Children and the National Union of Teachers' disability working party and special needs committees.

Steve Scott



External relations manager for Remploy, Steve developed a graduate recruitment programme to increase the number of disabled people in management posts.

Katherine Thomas



Katherine is a qualified archivist and is currently advising museums, archives and libraries on equality and diversity, and project-managing research in the field.

Alex Thorburn



Since 1995, Alex has worked as an advocate for disabled people and has set up coalitions and a centre for independent living.

Zara Todd



Zara was a disabled students' officer at university. She has worked with Transport for London and the Greater London Authority, among others, advising on equality and diversity.

Fiona Wallace



Fiona is a director of People First Scotland and serves on the The Same As You? implementation group. She was an inspector on the first joint inspection of services for people with learning difficulties.

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Major progress in fight against heart disease

BY SUNIL PECK

Deaths caused by heart disease have fallen by more than a third in ten years, according to a Department of Health report.

The progress report* also says the estimated number of lives saved through the use of cholesterol-reducing drugs has more than tripled since 2000, to 9,700 per year in 2005.

There are more consultant cardiologists and heart surgeons; and twice as many people receive clot-busting drugs within half an hour of arriving at hospital than in 2000.

There has also been a 28 per cent reduction in the gap between the worst hit areas and the rest of the country in premature deaths from heart disease, strokes and related diseases, since 2000.

Professor Peter Weissberg, medical director of the British



Heart Foundation**, acknowledged that heart disease care in England has improved, but added: "Despite the continued fall in premature deaths from heart attacks, coronary heart disease remains

the UK's single biggest killer.

"And the same efforts that have gone into achieving improvements in heart attack care now need to be aimed at all areas of cardiovascular diseases, including stroke and angina."

Health secretary Patricia Hewitt said: "We are one of the highest spending countries in Europe for cardiovascular diseases, with one of the fastest improving services."

She pointed to new cardiothoracic centres and catheter laboratories closer to people's homes, better equipment and lower mortality rates.

The report says the NHS will focus on heart failure, rehabilitation and end of life care in the next stage of its heart services programme.

**The coronary heart disease national service framework: Shaping the future – progress report for 2006; for a copy, tel: 0870 1555 455 or visit: www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications*

***The British Heart Foundation: heart information line, tel: 08450 70 80 70 or visit: www.bhf.org.uk*

New studies add weight to Sativex chronic pain claims

DN CAMPAIGN

The cannabis-based drug Sativex can ease chronic pain in people with two different conditions, according to new studies.

The studies by the drug's manufacturer, GW Pharmaceuticals (GW), show that patients with a condition called allodynia experienced improvements in their management of pain and quality of sleep after taking Sativex.

Allodynia is the occurrence of pain in response to a normally non-painful stimulus, such as clothes touching the skin.

The results of a second study show people with diabetic neuropathy obtained "substantial" improvements in their pain.

Dr Stephen Wright, GW's research and development director, said: "Neuropathic pain is one of the most difficult types of chronic pain to treat. These studies focused on particularly high-need patients, who were already taking the best available pain treatments, and yet still suffered severe pain.

"Even in this most difficult to treat population, Sativex has produced improvements over and above current treatments that are highly meaningful to the everyday lives of patients."

GW is working to secure a licence for Sativex's use for symptoms of multiple sclerosis and other conditions.

Alzheimer's breakthrough 'highly encouraging'

Researchers have developed an antibody with the potential to block production of the brain chemical linked to Alzheimer's disease.

The results of the study show it is possible to decrease production of a small protein called amyloid, which is believed to be the main cause of the disease. Deposits of amyloid build up in the brain, preventing it from functioning properly.

The researchers, based at

the Welsh School of Pharmacy, Cardiff University, have developed an antibody which binds to a protein in the brain, preventing the production of amyloid.

Dr Emma Kidd, who led the research, said: "Our results are highly encouraging at this stage. We believe that our approach could lead in time to a new therapy for this distressing and debilitating disease as it should prevent or reduce the irreversible deteri-

oration of a patient's memory and other brain functions."

She added: "This would also reduce the burden on carers, usually family members, who look after patients in the earlier stages of the disease."

Professor Clive Ballard, director of research at the Alzheimer's Society, which funded the research, said: "As a charity, we rely on donations from the public and we hope people will understand how important it is to invest more in

research into all types of dementia so that we eventually may have a selection of new treatments to change the lives of people with dementia and their carers."

Any development of the antibody as a drug will take several years and the researchers are planning the next stage of development of the antibody.

**Alzheimer's Society national helpline, tel: 0845 3000 336 or visit: www.alzheimers.org.uk*

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Improve medicine management, says commission

More must be done to improve the management of medicines in NHS mental health trusts, according to a report* by the Healthcare Commission (HC).

The report found that a patient in the care of a mental health trust is more likely to have problems with their medicines than a patient in the care of an acute hospital trust.

HC chief executive Anna Walker said: "This is an extremely important safety issue for both acute and mental health trusts. There is a clear message that both primary care trusts in their role as commissioners, and mental health trusts in particular, need to look at their medicines management."

The commission's survey found that 92 per cent of mental health service-users have taken medicines in the last year.

**The National Review of Medicines Management; for a copy, tel: 020 7448 9200 or visit: www.healthcarecommission.org.uk*

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British swimmers' 'fantastic' victory

BY IVY BROADHEAD

The British swimming team won the World Championship title in December, after scooping a total of 52 medals at the IPC Swimming World Championships in Durban.

The 33-member team won 24 gold medals, just in front of the USA's 23 and the Ukraine with 20. The women's 20-points 4x50m medley team took the final gold to secure the title, with team members Liz Johnson, Fran Williamson, Natalie Jones and Jane Stidever.

Danielle Watts won four individual golds, David Roberts three and three swimmers won two: Nyree Lewis, Sascha Kindred and Kenny Cairns.

Minister for sport Richard Caborn said the team's success was "a fantastic achievement".

The event was the first opportunity for British Paralympic swimmers to compete at such a high level since the last Paralympic Games, in Athens in 2004. With the 2008 games approaching, Caborn added: "The success builds on the achievements of Athens and I am sure that all those involved with Paralympic swimming will now be focused upon a



Golden boys: Anthony Stephens won gold in the 200m S5 freestyle and James Crisp (*inset*) took gold and set a new world record in the 400m S9 freestyle during the 2006 IPC Swimming World Championships

committed training schedule in the lead up to Beijing. I very much hope the success to date can be replicated."

Tim Reddish, national performance director, said: "The success was way beyond our expectations. Our world-class preparation for the event was

reflected by the team's outstanding performances. We were the best prepared team in Durban."

British Paralympic Association chief executive, Phil Lane, added: "The team that competed in Durban included several younger ath-

letes, which certainly bodes well for the future. "Although we don't yet know the strength of the Chinese team in the pool, we showed in Durban that we can beat the best in the world - an achievement we can hopefully repeat in Beijing."

UK gold medallists:

David Roberts, S7 400m freestyle, 100m freestyle, 50m freestyle; Nyree Lewis, S6 100m backstroke and 400m freestyle; James Anderson, S2 50m freestyle; Danielle Watts, S1 50m freestyle, 50m breaststroke (world record), 50m backstroke and 100m freestyle; Andrew Lindsay, S7 100m backstroke; Matt Walker, Graham Edmunds, David Roberts and Robert Welbourn, 4X100m freestyle relay, 34-points (world record); Gareth Duke, SB6 100m breaststroke (world record); Liz Johnson, SB6 100m breaststroke (world record); Sascha Kindred, SB7 100m breaststroke, SM6 200m individual medley (world record); Kenny Cairns, S3 200m freestyle, 100m freestyle; Anthony Stephens, S5 200m freestyle; Fran Williamson, S3 50m backstroke; James Crisp, S9 400m freestyle (world record); Natalie Jones, SM6 200m individual medley (world record); and Fran Williamson, Liz Johnson, Natalie Jones and Jane Stidever, 4x50m medley, 4x50m freestyle relay, both 20-points.

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World inaction: (From left to right) A former soldier with mental health problems is chained to a bed in an asylum in Luanda, Angola; disabled Londoner Nancy Maguire addressed the United Nations in New York to ensure the convention included the views of young disabled people; and a woman begs for money while carrying her disabled husband on her back in Calcutta, India

The global fight for disabled people

A new United Nations convention aims to help 650 million disabled people worldwide. But what impact will it have in practice? Sunil Peck investigates

After five years working on the first human rights treaty of the 21st century, Dr Richard Light could be excused some element of personal satisfaction.

After all, the UN treaty aims to protect and promote the human rights of 650 million disabled people worldwide.

But two days before the convention was to be adopted in December, Dr Light warned a packed meeting of the all party parliamentary group on disability that it could amount to "little more than empty rhetoric" for disabled Britons, unless the government signs up and implements it effectively.

However, Light did hail the treaty as a testament to "over two decades of campaigning by disabled people and our supporters".

"The government, and most especially disabled people, have every reason to be proud of what has been achieved," he said.

Although he is confident of the commitment of Anne McGuire, the minister for disabled people, he told the meeting he was "less confident" of the cooperation and support she will receive from some other government departments.

So what impact is the new convention likely to have on disabled people in the UK and

around the world?

Announcing the adoption of the convention on 13 December, Kofi Annan, the UN secretary-general, said it represented the "dawn of a new era" for disabled people, and described it as "the most rapidly-negotiated human rights treaty in the history of international law".

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with

'The government has given its support to both the convention and the wider goal of advancing disabled people's rights'

Disabilities was drafted with the intention of replacing welfare and charity with new rights and freedoms. Countries will be legally obliged to abolish laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination.

But before the convention can come into force and any of these issues can be addressed, 20 of the UN's 192 member states must sign up to it. This process of "ratification" will begin at the end of next month.

McGuire is eager for the UK to be one of the first countries to sign up, and says: "The government has given its whole-hearted support to both the

convention and the wider goal of advancing disabled people's human rights."

Other countries in Europe and the rest of the world are expected to sign up over the next few months.

But Caroline Ellis, head of parliamentary affairs at the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), says that, even if the UK signs up, there will be challenges to implementing the convention and that changes may be needed to ensure that domestic legislation matches up to the standards it sets out.

Ellis says: "The DRC believes disabled people must have clear rights in law to decide where and with whom they live and to [have] effective protection against involuntary institutionalization.

"We also believe community care policy and practice fails to provide sufficient protection for the right to family life. Practical changes may be needed here."

Mark Harrison, chair of the international committee of the United Kingdom's Disabled People's Council (UKDPC), believes disabled people's organisations worldwide have a huge part to play in implementation. But he is concerned that growing numbers of organisations of disabled people are unable to survive, due to a lack of funding.

He thinks this could prevent

the convention being implemented because "effective implementation requires effective organisations of disabled people to hold governments to account".

Jabulani Ncube, a consultant in disability and development in Namibia, says the treaty is good news for people in the developing world where, according to the UN, 80 per cent of the world's disabled population live.

"I believe that the convention will help to bring the spotlight on disability issues, as both a human rights and a development issue in developing countries, perhaps more than has happened before," he says.

Isaac Kute, chief executive of Action on Disability and Development (ADD), an international development agency working with disabled people in Asia and Africa, thinks the convention is "overdue".

"One of the biggest barriers disabled people face is not so much the fact that institutions, governments and agencies, who provide essential services, have discriminatory practices. One of the biggest barriers is attitudinal barriers."

He adds: "It doesn't matter how many laws you have, or what legislation, or how many conventions you have. If your neighbour is still prejudicial, you've got a very big mountain to climb."

Ncube agrees: "Much awareness of disability issues needs to be developed in countries of the global

south, where disabled people have continued to suffer social, political and economic exclusion even if disability issues have been gaining visibility during the last three decades. If the momentum that has been established by the convention-building process is maintained, increased good can come to disabled people in the form of improved policies, resources and practices."

The convention says inclusion should be achieved "progressively", but sets no deadlines. But it does say that any country opting in

'It doesn't matter how many conventions you have. If your neighbour is still prejudicial, you've got a very big mountain to climb'

must take immediate steps to raise awareness and foster respect for disabled people's rights.

Tomas Lagerwall, secretary general of Rehabilitation International (RI), a network promoting disability rights in nearly 100 countries, is upbeat about the changes the convention will bring.

He says: "The Convention on the Rights of the Child has resulted in increased visibility and awareness of children's rights and I believe that the living conditions for children will gradually improve."

"Similarly, the Convention on the Elimination of All



People's rights

Forms of Discrimination against Women has increased women's rights."

Ncube adds: "It could well be that the people who will reap its strategic benefits might

not be the current generation of fighters who have brought us to this point, but the unborn children who might live life as disabled people in a changed environment."

Human rights violations in the developing world

Africa: David*, from Kenya, became disabled in his 50s. His wife left him and took their children with her. Before becoming disabled, he had been a bus driver and had also trained as a welder and a car mechanic, according to a World Bank report.

Because of his impairment, he lacked the strength to drive a car and nobody had ever mentioned to him that a car could be adapted for him. No-one would employ him and he couldn't find the money to buy the equipment to set up as a self-employed welder. He returned to his childhood village and spends most days sitting outside his small house receiving food hand-outs from neighbours. *Not his real name

South America: A five-year-old with learning difficulties, who was unable to speak, was tied up in a cage by his family in Suriname, South America, because they said he was "not a human being" because he couldn't talk. He had a chain tied around his neck and was fed inedible food, according to a report by Inclusion International.

Aged seven, social workers discovered the boy and tried to find him a new family and school. He now lives in a residential home which provides care and vocational training.

India: Virtually all the disabled women and girls living in one Indian village were beaten at home, according to a 2004 survey. The survey found that a quarter of women with learning difficulties had been raped and six per cent of disabled women had been forcibly sterilised.

Middle East: A deaf 17-year-old from Yemen says he finds it very painful when other people express negative attitudes towards him and his friends when they speak sign language in the street. He can feel people staring, which makes him angry, says the World Bank report.

His dream for the future is to work with electricity, or pursue a profession which does not entail speaking to customers. He is looking for a job, but no one wants to hire him because of the perceived communication problems.

Bulgaria: A 24-year-old was found dead in the State Psychiatric Hospital in Karlukovo, Bulgaria, in June 2005. According to reports, his body showed extensive bruising.

Hospital staff were said to have told his parents that an autopsy could only be performed if they paid for one, even though the hospital was obliged to perform an autopsy under the country's health care act.

The regional prosecutor ordered an investigation after the local prosecutor initially declined to investigate the death, according to a report by Amnesty.

Romania: Disabled children were found starving and near death at an adult psychiatric facility in Braila, Romania. Several teenagers weighed less than 30 pounds, according to Mental Disability Rights International.



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‘We are stuck – no doubt about it’



DN’s investigation into how poverty affects disabled people continues with the Naether family, who can barely afford the basic necessities of life. Elizabeth Choppin talks to them about their struggle with mounting debt

“I’ve got to watch every single penny,” explains Robert Naether, 55, about his life as a disabled man in Llanelli, south Wales.

He and his wife Madeline, 59, (pictured below with their grandson Daniel) have rented a bungalow for the last ten years on a road of council houses primarily occupied by disabled people.

“It’s a kind of disabled estate,” says Robert.

Oddly, the road is at the top of a steep hill, which has no public transport links. This is worrying, since the Naethers plan to turn over their Motability van in September as they can no longer afford it.

But this is just one of the many worries that plague Robert Naether.

The over-arching issue, he feels, is the lack of money for his family to live decently.

He has not worked since an accident in 1991 left him with spinal cord damage, and he now walks with a cane and uses a wheelchair.

Madeline, who has spina bifida, was employed in a latex glove factory until she had to stop work in 1980 due to her health. The couple have been married for 35 years.

Both the Naethers receive

government benefits, which bring in about £1,350 every four weeks. But with bills and expenses typically over £1,300 every month, there is not much room to breathe financially.

This means cutting right down on extras like eating out (“never”), mobile phones or entertainment other than television, and in the winter – a warm home. Robert refuses to apply for credit cards because “they get you into trouble”.

In instances when extra costs arise, there is nothing to cushion them except the £5 a month Robert puts away just in case.

The idea of a holiday is an absolute pipe dream, they laugh.

“I don’t expect to have the same amount of money as a working person,” he says, “but I expect a benefit which takes me out of poverty, because that is what we’re in at the moment.”

Robert and Madeline have an extra concern in that they look after two of their grandchildren – Daniel, 14, and Nathan, 12 – full-time because of family issues.

“There is no room to say, ‘Well, we’ll cut back on food.’ We can’t, because we’ve got the two kids with us,” he says. They have been trying to secure state money for the children – but haven’t received it yet.

Due to Madeline’s condition, the Naethers also need to keep the kitchen stocked with fresh fruit and vegetables, which can increase the grocery bill considerably. Clothing and household costs are also higher because of specific needs around both of their conditions. Plus, rises in the price of heating mean that winter is a chilly prospect.

“Sometimes we stay dressed during the night or only heat one room for a few hours,” Robert says. “The heating is never allowed to stay on at night. It’s off even if it’s freezing.”

Robert has sent many letters to his MP and the local authority to explain the difficulty he is facing, but his MP told him she believes the level of benefits he

‘I don’t expect the same amount of money as a working person, but I expect a benefit which takes me out of poverty’

receives is adequate.

Robert wonders how this can be the case when his family can’t afford to heat their home or have very little money at all beyond food, shelter and basic needs. Fuel costs are going through the roof, yet benefits do not rise accordingly, he says.

“It makes me angry. They are totally ignoring us.”

A winter fuel payment will help when Madeline turns 60 next year – but what about now?

Robert says Labour has abandoned disabled people. And David Cameron’s promise to lift disability to the top of the agenda does not sway him either because he doesn’t believe anything politicians say.

“We’re the lowest of the low,” he says. “Since Mr Blair could not care about disabled people he will more than likely tell us to find employment, or

perhaps he hopes the cold might rid him of us.”

Robert has been looking for a job for three years. There was a Pathways to Work pilot in the area but he didn’t find it helpful. On each visit, he was handed three printouts from the Jobcentre Plus job bank, one of which included a post washing windows. “Not very helpful when you are sitting in a wheelchair,” he says, dryly.

Unemployment is rife in Llanelli for everyone – not just disabled people. The Remploy factory in Swansea is a prospect, but he has been told it would be six or seven years before he could get a position there.

“The only work for us is in the shops,” he says, but then cites research from the Disability Rights Commission which found that a high number of retail shops in Llanelli have restricted access.

“It’s a sham. It’s a disaster. We’re not even being asked to attend Pathways interviews down here because there is no work.”

The lack of funding for disabled people and decent jobs – these are the issues to tackle, he believes. He has no problem working – he wants to – but he doesn’t want a job that has been created just to keep disabled people busy, like his mate who hands out baskets at Tesco.

“That’s demeaning. I don’t want to do a demeaning job. I want a real job. Picking up litter off the ground – I’ll do that. If they wanted me to stock shelves I’d do it, because shelves need to be stocked,” he says. “But the Llanelli Tesco does not have any disabled people working out on the floor.”

So why do the Naethers stay in Llanelli? Robert says they were told by the council that a bigger city like Cardiff might afford more opportunities, but a move would cost money the

Naethers don’t have. They were also told it wasn’t possible to apply for housing in Cardiff – that it had to be a “swap” with people in the Cardiff system.

“We’re so low on expectations,” he says. “We are stuck – there is no doubt about that.”

Ins and outs

INCOME:

Robert

Incapacity benefit – £121/week
DLA mobility component – £43.45/week
DLA care component – £62.25/week
Weekly total: £226.70

Madeline

Incapacity benefit – £94.50/week
DLA mobility component – £16.50/week
Weekly total: £111

Monthly (four-week) total: £1,350.80

MONTHLY EXPENDITURE: (some figures approximate)

Motability van – £173.80
Petrol – £25
Electricity – £47.33
Gas – £33.33
Water – £40
Phone – £45.55
Rent – £240
Council Tax – £99.99
TV payment plan – £15
Clothes/household costs – £50
Food – £390
Taxis – £20
Contents insurance – £8
TV licence – £10.30
Bank overdraft repayment – £95 a month (now standing at £900)
Broadband – £29

Total monthly outgoings (calendar month): £1,322.30



Drowning in debt

DN's first poverty investigation sparked some unlikely reactions from our readers. Now it is time to ask some serious questions, says John Pring

When DN launched an investigation last month into how poverty was affecting the lives of disabled people in the UK, we wanted to try to put the issue back on the disability agenda.

Although a report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in December found the poverty rate for disabled adults was twice that for non-disabled adults, the issue rarely seems to be addressed.

This may be because there are so many other vital issues to campaign on, but the extent of poverty and how it affects disabled people's day-to-day lives is absolutely crucial.

The report into the first of our visits to the homes of our disabled readers the Mitchells produced a strong, but sometimes disturbing, reaction.

We must first deliver an apology: we mistakenly stated that Sue, Steve and Vera Mitchell each receive their incapacity benefit (IB) monthly. As has been pointed out, IB is usually paid fortnightly.

But although this appears to show that the family now have a fair amount of money left over to spend at the end of the month, they don't. They have heavy credit card repayments. In fact, between the three of them, their minimum payments on their various cards add up to almost £800 a month.

The debts have built up gradually over the years, and the cards are used to pay for unforeseen emergencies, such as the £1,200 stay in an accessible hotel while their lift was installed, or the new washer/dryer last December.

As Sue says: "It's not holidays or expensive cars or a clothing spree. It's important stuff. We haven't gone out and blown thousands of pounds over a few months. It's slowly been rising over the years. The minute you pay the bill, something else is bound to go wrong."

None of the family wanted to end up relying on benefits. Sometimes, they have to choose between staying warm or buying food. Sue, who is 28, says she hasn't been able to afford to go to the cinema for

nearly a year.

As Sue told us, tearfully, sometimes she just goes to bed early to avoid the cold. As she said: "It's better than sitting in the chair shivering."

Bearing all of this in mind, some of the criticisms that have been directed at the Mitchells are difficult to understand. Chris Goodman criticised the family for having a Sky subscription and a dog, and Sue for having an expensive wheelchair. He also criticised them for having a mortgage, and believes they should be living in a council house. Why? And since when was having a dog considered a luxury for a disabled person?

Another reader, who is not disabled but has a disabled partner, also criticises the Mitchells for having a Sky subscription. Graham Stokes thinks they should be content with BBC and ITV.

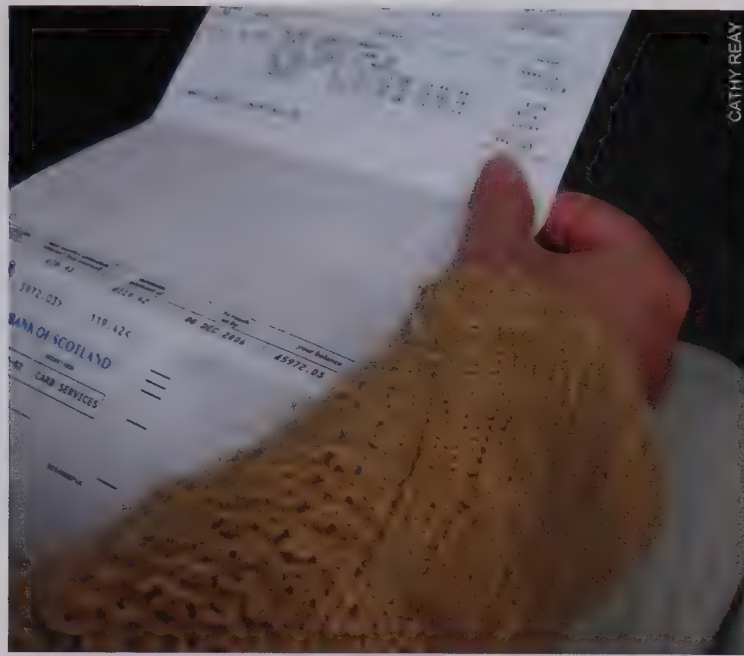
Why is it that disabled people who can't work should have to make do with a cheap wheelchair that doesn't meet their needs; and should not be allowed a single luxury? They are not living on benefits by choice.

What is also clear from the reaction to our piece, though, is that the Mitchells are not the only disabled people struggling with poverty in the UK. Dr Kohlinger, for example, emailed us to tell us about a couple of pensioners he knows, one of whom is disabled, and points out that they have a monthly shortfall of more than £200.

These are not black and white issues. But we should be talking about them and discussing them.

Our poverty series should raise some interesting and difficult questions. We already have a couple: Are the Mitchells typical among disabled people in their seemingly inevitable slide into serious and worsening debt? And are we really saying that disabled people who can't work should be forced to live hand-to-mouth in abject misery?

John Pring, acting editor
● Send your feedback on this issue to the usual address or email: john.pring@scope.org.uk



CATHY REAY

Stark contrast

I feel for the Mitchells' situation, but it is considerably better than many.

For example: Two pensioners, one is a severely disabled woman. Their income is £392 DLA and £763 pensions, giving a total of £1,155. Monthly outgoings: £186 Motability car, £20 car fuel, £325 Neuro physio, not available on NHS, £25 medicines, £21.26 bedpads, £35 electricity, £30 gas, £30 phone, £5 mobile phone, £14.99 internet, £9.99 television, £203 food, £303 for carers, £54 water, £69.95 loan for stand-up wheelchair, £35 for shoes/clothing/kitchen-household items and insurance. This leaves a shortfall of £212.19.

Dr G W Kohlinger, by email

Better off not working

The Mitchells' income per month according to your article is £1,822. This is more money than all of my non-disabled friends earn a month and some of them run their own company.

I get sick of hearing disabled people claim poverty. I worked for as long as I could before I had to stop. I was gobsmacked at how much better off I was when I wasn't working.

Helen, by email

'If you think they're poor'

The Mitchell family plead poverty with an income of over £1,800 per month – far more than most working people.

I can't understand why they need Sky television when BBC and ITV should be sufficient. And as for spending £360 a

month on food for three people – I wish!

I have a works pension of £525 per month, out of which I must find £375 for rent, £85 for council tax, £20 per month for phone bills, £20 for car insurance, £13 road tax, £40 petrol, £30 electricity and £35 heating oil – this excludes food and clothing.

Graham Stokes, by email

'Economic extravagance'

I was startled at the Mitchells' economic extravagance.

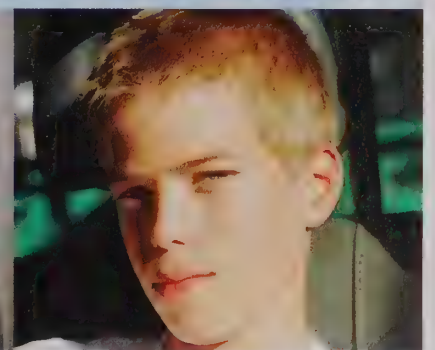
Mortgage £280 per month? They are buying their house when they could be eligible for an adapted council house with rent allowance. Sky TV premium subscription £53.50? The family package is only £21 per month.

I assume the wheelchair payment of £248 is a purchase instalment, unless the wheelchair is a super model. A quick online search reveals a new hand-propelled wheelchair from under £300 and electric wheelchairs/scooters for under £1,000. Wheelchair maintenance of £133 a month – that's £1,596 a year, more than enough to buy a new one.

A family so beset with problems should find a dog a considerable expense – £20 a month to cover dog food, pet insurance and vet costs is a considerable expenditure when pleading poverty.

Chris Goodman, by email

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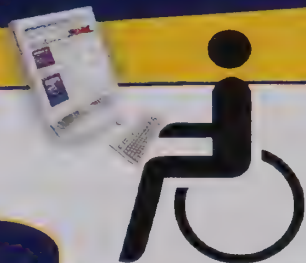
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It's all about the dancing

Celeste Dandeker-Arnold changed the world of dance when she co-founded CandoCo 16 years ago. She tells Paul Carter about her new OBE and why she doesn't create work about disability

Disability arts have always struggled to receive recognition beyond the disability sphere and gain wider mainstream credibility.

One person who has done more than most to help break down those barriers is Celeste Dandeker-Arnold (*pictured, right*), co-founder of CandoCo, the integrated dance company that features both disabled and non-disabled dancers.

In the New Year's honours list, announced at the end of December, Celeste was awarded an OBE to add to the MBE she received for services to dance and disability in 1997. Meeting her at her London

'I think we are seen in the mainstream now. We have to fight for funding like everyone else'

home, her passion for dance is clear and she has strong views about the ethos behind CandoCo and its place in the world of dance.

"The driving force is to be a dance company, not to be seen as that integrated dance company," she says, managing to be both elegant and forceful.

"I think we are seen in the mainstream of dance now. We have to fight for the funding like everyone else. I think in a



Critically acclaimed: CandoCo dancers in action

way we're still fairly unique in having the kind of profile the company has in this country, compared with other integrated or disabled-led companies."

As one of the first full-time students at the London School of Contemporary Dance, Celeste was heavily involved with the world of dance when she became disabled in 1973. It was during a performance with the London Contemporary Dance Theatre that she fell and injured her spine, causing her to lose the use of her legs and restrict the movement in her arms.

She admits that the prospect of never being able to dance again was something she initially found extremely difficult to deal with.

"I had no idea what I was going to do after that because I loved dance," she says. "It was all I ever wanted to do and it occupied my whole life really. I was very much in a quandry for quite a few years, as the idea of going back to dance or having anything to do physically with dance just didn't seem a possibility."

In fact it took 16 years before Celeste actively participated in dance again, when director and choreographer Darshan Singh-Buller asked her to perform in a film he was making for the BBC2 series *10x10*.

So how did going back into a dance studio feel after such a long time away? She says that even then, she had a desire to produce dance that was not only inclusive, but credible.

"It was strange," she says. "I still felt the same, I still understood what movement was. I didn't want to look like I was trying to do what other people did, it had to be my own movement, so it was very exploratory."

Two years after the film screened – winning awards and critical acclaim – Celeste was introduced to visual artist and dance education student Adam Benjamin. The pair saw the opportunity to run dance workshops for both disabled and non-disabled people at the National Training Centre in Stanmore. CandoCo was born.



The company went on to be a critical and popular success. Audience figures reached 16,000 a year, and international tours have taken in over 50 countries worldwide.

Initially, Celeste says she faced barriers from within the arts community, from people who didn't know how to react to the company or its work.

"There were a lot of people who were excited but weren't quite sure where to put it or how it fitted, but I always maintained that if you're going to be a dance company, it's a dance company. The disability side of it is there, you can see it, but we don't make work about disability. It's not that interesting."

But when pressed on the issue of whether integrated companies like CandoCo could harm opportunities for solely disabled dance groups, she is quick to react.

"I don't see any competition whatsoever. I'm not in there to compete at all. I think each to their own, whatever way people want to express their art, that's entirely up to them."

Whenever the conversation turns to the work of CandoCo, Celeste is keen to stress that the work itself is more important than the fact that it contains disabled dancers.

"For this company, I've always had it in my head, and I'm a bit dogmatic about this, but I'm really focused on the dance and not the disability, or even the integration as such. I just think, what are the possibilities?"

Celeste is also keen to

dismiss the notion that dancers with certain impairments are excluded from the company.

"We're not dogmatic in saying, 'this is the exercise, do this.' For instance, in an audition, suppose it was an arm movement and you weren't able to move your arm, how else could you express it with the body? Could you do it with your head? What about turning? Does that mean the body has to turn or could the chair turn? It puts different thought processes in your

'I'm focused on the dance and not the disability, or even the integration. I just think, what are the possibilities?'

mind [about] how you translate that task. It's all about the language of how you present something."

Disabled dancer Caroline Bowditch, who was introduced to dance through CandoCo masterclasses, emphasises the influence the company has had.

"They really were the pioneers – both in the UK and internationally – for changing the way people thought about dance and disability," she says.

However, she does have some criticisms.

"Looking at all the disabled dancers they've worked with, it feels like they are able-bodied, but sitting down, or missing a limb."

Partly, she concedes, this is due to the high-level of physical fitness and dance

WHO IS SHE?

Celeste Dandeker-Arnold lives with her husband in north London.

She was one of the first full-time students at the London School of Contemporary Dance, and went on to tour with the London Contemporary Dance Theatre.

She co-founded the integrated dance company CandoCo in 1991 after appearing in *The Fall*, a film for BBC series *10x10*.

She will step down as artistic director of CandoCo later this year after 16 years in the role.

training required for CandoCo's performances.

However, "there is still a particular image of what a dancer is within CandoCo, which is very mainstream. I think their success is partly down to that," she says.

Later this year, Celeste will stand down as artistic director of CandoCo at the age of 55, after 16 years in the role.

So, what next for someone who has been involved with dance for so long?

"It's not that I don't want to be doing it: I love the work, I love the people," she says. "It's just been a long 16 years. I'd like to spend some time with my husband, and do some things, though I'm not quite sure what yet!"

So does she see her OBE as a fitting sign-off to her tenure at CandoCo?

In typically modest fashion, she is reluctant to take sole credit, instead choosing to reflect on the many people who have helped make it such a groundbreaking success.

"I think that it's a real recognition of what the company has achieved and the OBE is about the company really, it's not about me. There's no way I could have done it on my own. I've been supported by a fantastic team always."

So will she find it difficult to let go after so long at the top?

"I'll still be their biggest fan, but it will be hard. I will be upset I'm sure, but I'll be very happy if I know that the right person or people are taking it on."

African honeymoon



Talan Skeels-Piggins and his new wife Jo did not hesitate when booking a honeymoon in Africa, and they soon discovered that access would not be an issue, thanks to the locals

Africa has always held a fascination for me, so when it came to deciding on a location for my honeymoon, there was never any other choice.

My friends were initially sceptical; how was a wheelchair-user (T4 complete) ever going to cope in the heart of Africa with the problems of transport, accommodation and scorching heat?

I enlisted the help of Louise de Waal at Baobab Travel, who made it her mission to ensure that Jo and I would be looked after wherever we went, despite the lack of accommodation designed specifically with accessibility in mind.

After a 12-hour flight from Heathrow, and a scary moment when the ground staff couldn't see my wheelchair in the hold, we arrived in Lusaka for a brief stop, before continuing our journey to Livingstone.

The second leg was on a small plane and it was then that we discovered that aisle chairs did not seem to exist in Africa.

However, what the Africans lacked in equipment, they made up for in manpower.

The Health and Safety Executive would have had a field day. The ground staff just enlisted the help of a few friends to push, pull, lift and drag until they got me where I needed to be.

Livingstone was hot and dry. After a 30-minute drive, we arrived at Stanley Safari Lodge, a beautiful open-plan thatched

building with ten private rooms. Our suite had two bedrooms, a living area, bathroom, toilet and a private pool.

The access wasn't as easy as initially expected: five steps down and two up into the room. This did not pose a problem for the hosts, as they assigned one of the staff to us for the duration of our stay.

Our man, Mike, would bring meals to the room or help me to the main lodge, where we would eat under the stars.

During our three-day stay, we had opted for a helicopter flight over Victoria Falls, a visit to the ancient Mukuni village and a

'I was able to participate in all activities thanks to the willingness of the local people to lend a hand'

canoe trip to Livingstone Island to get up close and personal with the Falls. I was able to participate in all of these activities thanks to the extraordinary willingness of the local people to lend a helping hand as the temperature soared.

From Livingstone, we flew to Mfuwe in South Luangwa National Park for a five-day safari. Mfuwe Lodge was the most accessible of all the accommodation we stayed at, with ramps everywhere, a large chalet to sleep in and a sunken bath, which I was able to drop into with the aid of a rope hanging from the ceiling.

drive during the few blissfully cool hours of the early morning, before returning to the lodge for brunch.

From 11am, it was simply too hot to move, so we would have a nap before rising again for afternoon tea at 4pm and going out on the second drive.

At 6pm we would stop at a beauty spot for a sundowner before doing a couple more hours of night-driving with a spotter armed with a large flashlight. Our driver, Fannuel, was fairly new to the job but incredibly keen. He also became very aware of the issues I faced with regard to the heat and did his best to help out where he could.

Before travelling to Africa, I had bought a vest filled with ice packs. Staff at the Lodge would freeze the packs overnight so that I could pop them into the vest before the drive started; and I would also wear a bandana and wristbands soaked in water, although the heat was such that they would dry out within a few minutes. Fortunately, Fannuel always carried a cool box filled with cold drinks and ice, and he would stop every so often to soak the bandana and wristbands for me.

The wildlife is at its best during October, the hottest part of the year, and we saw some incredible sights. Watching a lion lapping from a lagoon at night, oblivious to us just a few feet away in the jeep, and witnessing around 150 elephants crossing the river at sunset, were among the highlights.

From Mfuwe, we flew direct to Lilongwe in Malawi on a private charter flight. It was somewhat easier to transfer into this little four-seater aircraft, than to be manhandled up the steps of some of the Zambian Airways planes. After a bumpy three-and-a-half hour drive, we arrived at Danforth Yachting, a small four-room lodge run by the lovely Howard and Michelle, from South Africa.

The breeze coming off the vast Lake Malawi was a welcome relief after the oppressive heat of Zambia. Our room was delightfully decorated in blue and white, inspired by Mufasa, the ocean-going catamaran that Howard and Michelle had transported from South Africa to Malawi.

After the busy routine in Mfuwe, we settled into a more relaxed way of life. Nonetheless, with Howard's encouragement, we managed to go dinghy sailing, snorkelling and scuba diving. I had great fun being towed along behind the waterski boat on an inflatable doughnut (*below*), and we enjoyed a sunset cruise on Mufasa on our final evening (*left*).

Living with a disability doesn't have to mean you can't do trips like this. With a little planning and a large helping of determination – not to mention a few extra pairs of willing hands – anything can be done.

● **Baobab Travel**, tel: 0870 382 5003 or visit: www.baobabtravel.com
 ● **Stanley Safari Lodge**, Livingstone, Zambia, tel: 0027 31 762 2424 or visit: www.afrizim.com/Places/Victoria_Falls/Accommodation/Livingstone-hotels/Stanley_Safaris.asp
 ● **Mfuwe Lodge**, South Luangwa National Park, Zambia, tel: 00260 6 245 041 or visit: www.mfuvelodge.com/lodge.htm
 ● **Danforth Yachting**, Lake Malawi, tel: 00265 996 0077 or visit: www.danforthyachting.com

Talan Skeels-Piggins (pictured, top, in the ancient Mukuni village, near Livingstone) is a member of the British adaptive ski team and was the first officer to be retained in the Armed Forces following paralysis





The Lost World

Writer and photographer Mark Davidson discovered a land of mountains, waterfalls and kingfishers on his trip to Venezuela



Clockwise from above: Kukenan and Roraima; the Kama Falls; the Stegolepis Guianensis flower on Roraima; a wrecked airplane; the Orinoco River; the summit of Roraima El Carro; a jeep ride; Angel Falls

Professor Challenger set a startling pace that, along with the threat of being attacked by pterodactyls, was enough to scare anyone to death. We had to reach the summit to see for ourselves the

monsters and beasts that roamed the plateau of Roraima, the largest Tepui in Venezuela.

As we reached our goal, one of the porters was savagely attacked. Although I tried to help, I felt the razor-sharp claws

sink into the back of my neck...

I awoke from my dream. I'd been reading *The Lost World*, by Arthur Conan Doyle, the story of a group of explorers discovering Mount Roraima.

I myself was on a two-week

tour, travelling into territory virtually unknown to the outside world. I was to make an ascent of the table mountain of Roraima as well as traversing up the Churun River to see Angel Falls, the world's highest

waterfall at 979 metres.

The capital, Caracas, is a sprawling suburban city, typical of South America, with a mixture of Spanish and native Indian influence. As we drove towards Peraitepui de Roraima

"The atmosphere is one of care and happiness, and there is always a lot of joking and laughter"

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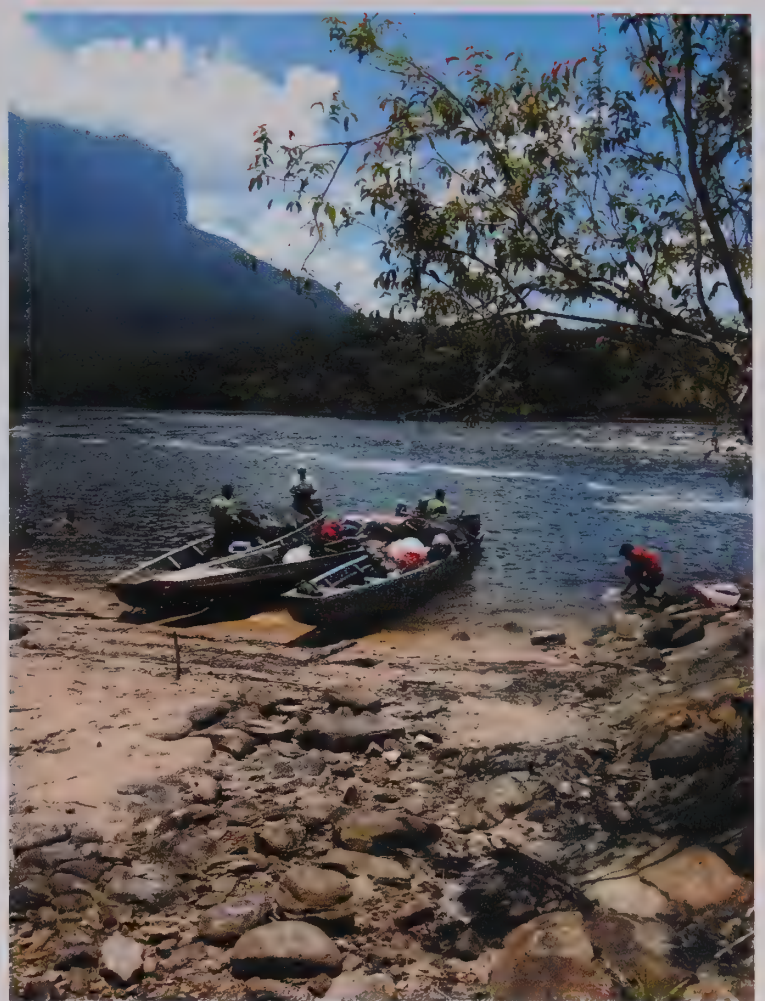
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(the start of the trek) I saw long industrial pipelines carrying oil and realised that this was the main source of income for the country, allowing wealth for a few, but poverty for many. I couldn't help but imagine what it was like for those with disabilities.

Roraima, at 2,810 metres, is the largest of all the Tepuis, the table-like mountains, and it was to take us over two days to reach the summit, El Carro, named due to it resembling the shape of a car.

Each night, we camped in tents, with only a bed roll providing protection from the hard rocks beneath. Meals were provided by the porters, who were able to cook a feast with only the bare essentials. Beef and chicken were the main types of fare, with an accompaniment of termites in hot sauce to make the meal more interesting! The porters, despite being smaller than westerners, were able to carry the equivalent of two backpacks in their hand woven baskets, supported by leather straps on their backs. Yet never a complaint was heard. They were well paid by Venezuelan standards and they took great pride in carrying our luggage.

The pathways were never

designed for anyone with full mobility, let alone for those with impairments. Unfortunately, there was little to hold onto as I scrambled upwards. It was a case of having to climb over large boulders, or grabbing lianas and even loose rocks. Rivers, sometimes overflowing from the daily rainfall, had to be crossed with the help of the guides, often using ropes as the water levels meant wading up to our waists. A good tip was to take off my boots and keep on my socks as they offered better grip on the slippery stones underfoot. I was always aware of having cerebral palsy and tended to rely on the porters and guides more than the non-disabled people on the tour.

After reaching the top of Roraima, we were able to explore the fauna and flora unique to this part of the world. There was even the opportunity to walk to Triple Point, where the three countries of Guyana, Brazil and Venezuela meet. However, due to the low-lying cloud I decided to forego this and stay around camp.

Once our descent of the mountain was complete, we took a small aeroplane flight

across the Gran Sabana (Great Savannah) to where we started our jungle river cruise towards Angel Falls.

The spectacular falls, called Parecupa Vena by the Indians, were discovered completely by accident by an American pilot and adventurer who was searching for gold. Jimmy Angel, after flying off-course on 16 November, 1933, spotted a huge table-top mountain below him, with a magnificent waterfall cascading from the top. Angel landed his monoplane on top of the mountain on 11 October, 1937, where it became mired in marshy ground. He made his way back to civilisation, but his plane remained embedded on the mountain until the Venezuelan airforce extracted it in 1969.

As we canoed up river, we were able to see small plantations where Kamarata Indians grow crops such as limes and chillies. Each evening, we retired to our hammocks in the jungle shelters provided for the tourists. Despite plenty of discomfort when sitting in a canoe, I was still able to enjoy watching the Green-and-rufous Kingfishers seemingly race



A high-speed boat ride on the Orinoco River

our craft as we sped along.

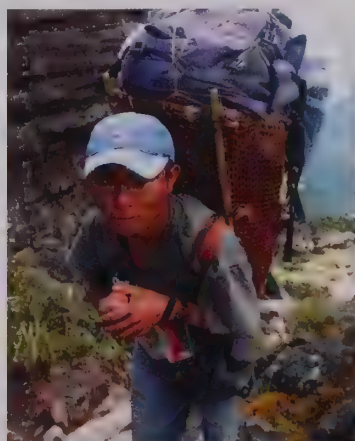
The trip culminated in a night at Canaima where we watched the sun disappear over the Hacha Falls, which continuously pour amber-tinted water (from the tannin leached from the rainforest) into the lagoon. The following

morning we had the chance to visit Salto el Sapo, where it was possible to walk behind the curtain of water as it tumbled over the falls. When viewing its tranquil setting, I reflected on the holiday and realised it was paradise found, not paradise lost.

Access: Unless you are able to walk under your own steam, it would not be possible to undertake such a trip. The terrain is rugged and can be difficult underfoot. The days are long and a certain degree of fitness is required to reach the top of the mountain. Despite having CP however, I was still able to complete the tour, with a little help from the guides and porters.

TRIP DETAILS:

Tour company: Explore Worldwide
Trip: "Venezuela - The Lost World"
Duration: 16 days/15 nights.
Price: Starts from £1,729 (2007)
Contact: Explore Worldwide, tel: 0870 333 4001 or visit www.explore.co.uk



Pictures, from left to right: Venezuelan children; a fruit-seller; one of the porters; one of the guides – a Kamarata Indian; a wooden religious symbol

Budget airlines, budget treatment

Competition between budget airlines is so intense that holidaymakers can find a flight for as little as £1. But are disabled people losing out on the cheap flights phenomenon? Lisa McCarthy investigates

Getting away from it all has never been easier. No-frills airlines offer bargain seats from as little as £1 to destinations across the UK and Europe. But just how easy is it for disabled people to take up these offers?

Once you have snapped up your cut-price seat, is it really as cheap and cheerful as the airlines claim to get you to and from your holiday destination?

Disabled businessman Phil Friend doesn't think so.

The director of disability training consultants Churchill, Minty and Friend says he has encountered various problems with budget airlines, from booking tickets to arrival at airports, and from customer service to boarding.

"Budget airlines are not as good at handling disabled people's access issues prior to flying as the other main

carriers," says Friend, who helped to launch DN's Flight Rights campaign, which highlights the problem of wheelchairs being damaged and lost on flights.

"Some of the problems stem from the incredibly fast turnaround of those airlines.

"Disabled people need more time and help, which budget airlines don't have.

"Their attitude is to cram you in, pack you high and get you out there as fast as possible."

Friend criticises budget airlines for their "budget" customer service and says disabled people face more problems because no two airlines have the same policies.

"The problem doesn't stop there; there are also issues on board including trying to access the toilets," he adds.

Several budget airlines have strict guidelines for disabled

people boarding their flights.

Assistance has to be booked in advance, and if it isn't, passengers may be turned away.

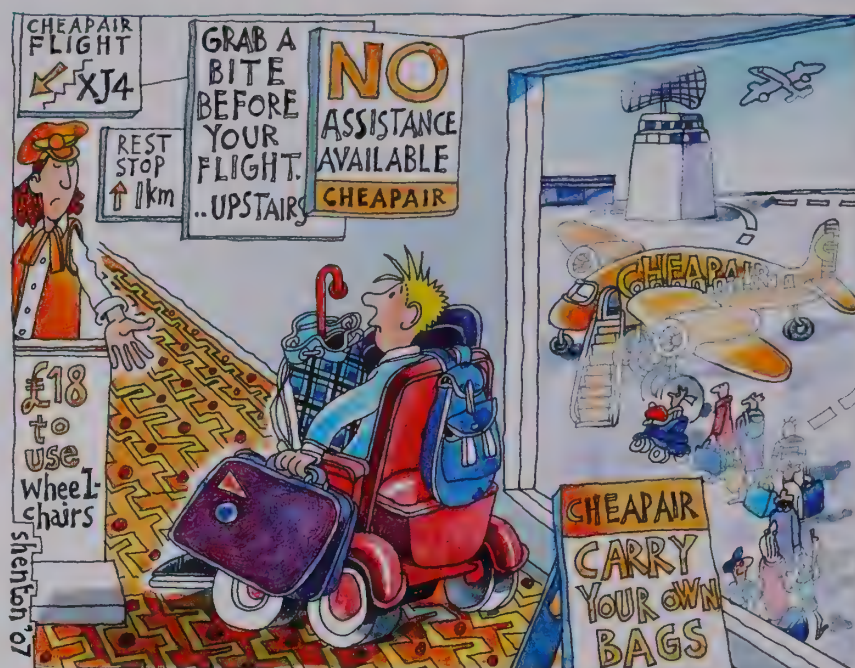
Restrictions on the number of wheelchair-users and guide dogs per flight, together with certain medical items which need to be accompanied by a doctor's note, make taking up the budget offers very difficult.

Actress Julie Fernandez, a wheelchair-user, says: "If you don't book assistance with budget airlines when you pay for your ticket, you get so much aggravation.

"I forgot to do it once when I had to travel to Europe for my grandmother's funeral and the airline refused to help me get from the terminal to the plane.

"They said they didn't have enough staff so my brother had to carry my wheelchair down to the plane and then come back for me.

"What bugs me the most is we have to pay the same



amount of money for a second-class service.

"We are just supposed to be grateful that they let us on the plane," she adds.

With so many hoops to jump through, new no-frills airports such as the Marseilles Provence 2 (MP2), soon to be followed by others in Lyon and Madrid, and the reduction in baggage allowance – from 20kgs to 15kgs – on Ryanair flights, are increasing the difficulties of

using budget airlines.

The newly-opened MP2 airport, which will be used by easyJet and Ryanair, seems to have definite access issues. Passengers have to carry their own bags from check-in to security control. There are no luggage trolleys, shuttle buses or horizontal escalators, and there are only 30 seats in the building, although the airport's website claims that "facilities for the disabled traveller can be



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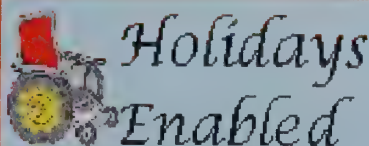
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provided on request by the airlines”.

Sue Pratt, senior press officer for the Disability Rights Commission, says: “We hear from lots of people who experience problems with airlines, and although there is no hard statistical evidence, we do seem to get more complaints from people who are attempting to use the budget carriers.

“Obviously, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) does not apply to other countries, but we would like to think that

UK-based airlines would fly to accessible airports.

“It doesn’t make economic sense to use airports like the new one in Marseilles, which appear to be inaccessible in many ways and would put disabled people off flying there,” she adds.

The UK government issued a voluntary code of practice in 2003 aimed at making air travel more user-friendly for disabled people and setting minimum standards for accessible travel.

The Access to Air Travel for

Disabled People code of practice applies to all UK airports and includes the check-in process, car-parking and boarding. However, the code, which is voluntary rather than mandatory, has been found by a government-funded study to be failing disabled people and it doesn’t cover one of the biggest budget airlines, Ryanair, because it is based in Ireland.

This has led to calls to bring air travel under the DDA.

Last year, the European Parliament approved new European Union rules which will improve the rights of disabled people and those with reduced mobility when travelling by air. The new legislation will stop disabled passengers being refused carriage on the grounds of their disability or lack of mobility and will make it illegal for airlines or airports to levy a charge for wheelchair assistance, although there are still concerns about levels of compensation.

Campaigners are hopeful that the new legislation will put an end to discrimination faced by disabled air passengers.

Neil Betteridge, chair of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, says: “Despite the voluntary code, we are continuing to get complaints every month from disabled travellers who use budget airlines, more so than

Airlines respond



Two of the big budget airlines – easyJet and Ryanair – responded to criticism that they are not accessible to disabled people by issuing statements.

easyJet statement: “easyJet have always strived to offer the best service to all disabled passengers.

“We have developed our access policies over a number of years, with the inclusion of feedback from disability organisations, government bodies and individuals.

“Our policies comply with all current legislation.

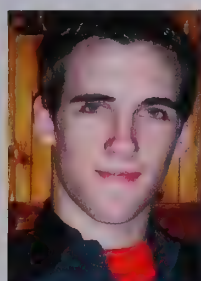
“However, we are still mindful that a lot needs to be done to make airports more accessible and with the pending implementation of the European legislation covering passengers with reduced mobility, this can only improve the level of service that is on offer presently.”

Ryanair statement: “Ryanair has made travel affordable for millions of people across Europe and we have opened up new travel opportunities for disabled, mobility-impaired and blind members of our society.

“We assist hundreds of thousands of disabled passengers per year which is not only testament to our low fares but also our superior customer service for all passengers.”

For further information on assistance provided for disabled travellers, visit: www.easyjet.com or www.ryanair.com

Stranded without an apology



Emlyn Whittick was returning from a business trip to Nice last September when his wheelchair went missing. The 22-year-old from Powys, Wales, was due to fly into Gatwick on an easyJet plane but his flight was redirected to Bristol.

“The only disadvantage to this was that we were rushed through security and customs and unfortunately because of the rush I left my car keys in a bag on my chair,” he says.

On arrival, Emlyn was told that his wheelchair was not in the aircraft hold. “They couldn’t tell me whether or not it was in Nice,” he says. “I asked to keep the airport chair they had provided and I was told I probably could. It turned out to be useless anyway as it wouldn’t fold up. Also, because I had left my car keys on my own wheelchair, I couldn’t fetch my car.”

Stranded without a wheelchair and unable to collect his car, Emlyn had to call on his partner’s parents to collect them.

“I got my chair back the following day, but that was after my father had driven 400 miles to deliver a spare wheelchair to me, before heading to Liverpool to pick up the lost one,” he says.

“No-one apologised to me and they treated it like a lost suitcase rather than a vital, expensive mobility aid.”

with the main carriers.

“Some of the main problems they face cover the physical aspects, such as disabled people having to stand in endless queues, or making information more accessible to people with learning difficulties.

“A lot of the problems come down to lack of staff training, which the airlines have to address. The EU regulations will hopefully help with this as well.

“There’s no getting away from it: disabled travellers are getting a raw deal.”



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Plan ahead for a great Kiwi

New Zealand is not out-of-bounds for disabled travellers, but you must plan well in advance to ensure an accessible holiday, says Adam Stanton-Wharmby

I am a 23-year-old college student with cerebral palsy. Last summer, I received a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship to New Zealand (NZ), to observe and understand how disability is perceived, experience the amazing culture and identify the actions that are being taken to try and create an inclusive society.

I used Travelbag, a travel agent recommended to me by friends.

Although they contacted the airline, hotels and taxis to query any possible areas of

concern on my travels, this information was not always correct and problems arose.

Travelbag were helpful, but in hindsight I realise that being very specific about my requirements is essential.

Disabled travellers should check if their travel agent can assist in obtaining any mobility equipment required – hiring a hoist was my responsibility, which complicated the trip.

I would also recommend planning as far ahead as possible before going to NZ, so you have the time to research accessible transport, hotels and tours.

Even though I was prepared for most eventualities, I still encountered various access issues that, for me, were big problems to overcome. For example, transferring from my wheelchair to the plane was a problem in England, as the airport staff were unable to move and handle me.

I did need a carer, as there was lots to explain with regards to my travel requirements.

Even though I had filled out all of the information needed prior to landing, airport staff often made me feel as though I was a difficult traveller. They took away my feeling of independence by insisting that I transfer from my electric wheelchair to a manual chair when I arrived at the airport. I also found that staff would talk to my carer more than me.

When arriving in NZ, a few more travel issues became apparent. The landscape is not ideal for wheelchair-users. It is hilly and, in some places, uneven paving made it tricky. Be sure that you are physically fit or that your electric wheelchair is in tip-top condition before you go there.

Public transport can cause some confusion. On buses with a wheelchair-accessible sign, for example, I couldn't get down the aisle at all, making it accessible only for small-sized chairs.

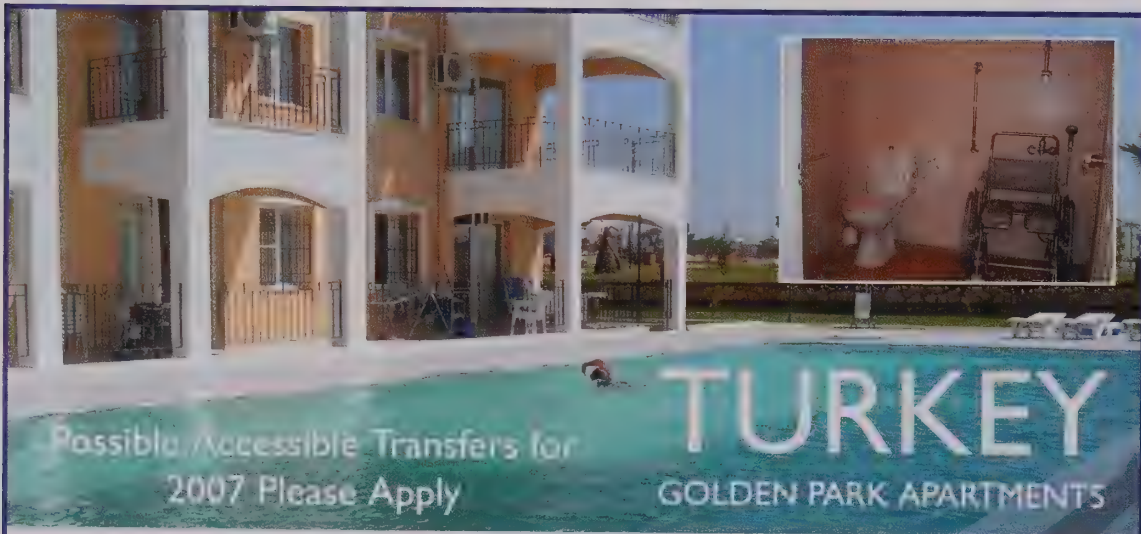
An accessible taxi service was booked in advance for me, so I could get from airports and to my hotels, but they

charged \$14 on top of the fare. They are also mostly only available between 10am and 1pm because they are contracted to pick up disabled school children. However, they are easier to organise after 4pm and are available all day if you book in advance.

New Zealanders reacted to me with both mild shock and interest. They seemed shocked that a disabled person would travel all that way and it is rare to see wheelchair-users out and about. When in Auckland city, we made a tally of all the wheelchair-users we saw on the streets – there was only one.

Everyone I talked to was interested in my research and enjoyed the opportunity to talk frankly to me. It was an eye-opener for many people in the service and tourism industry – when I was looking into accessible tours and trips, they realised they could not provide what I was requesting.

NZ itself was stunning. It is well-known as the setting for *The Lord of the Rings*. Within the cities I discovered places of immense interest and beauty, each one diverse and unique.



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adventure

The Sky Tower is a main attraction in Auckland and the highest tower in the southern hemisphere. At the base there are restaurants, bars, clubs, a casino and tourist information, but the real highlight is the observation deck, with its glass floor and stunning views of the city. It was all very accessible, including the toilets. Obviously, there were exceptions, but the size of the complex means you can always find accessible options close by.

Auckland War Memorial Museum, like other museums I visited, was very good. There were some hands-on attractions, such as a house in an earthquake. Excellent wheelchair access meant there wasn't too much for my carer to assist me with.

Rotorua, although quite touristy, was the most interesting place I visited. Situated on volcanic springs, shrouded in mist, its Maori culture and history is documented in museums and demonstrated in shows by the locals themselves.

The coach I took to Rotorua was inaccessible – it was

booked through my travel agent before I got there. I could have found alternative accessible transport if I had had the time to research it beforehand.

If you want to go on coach tours, you will have to plan in advance, as accessible tours are hard to find when you are there.

I found that I did a lot of driving in Rotorua, so be prepared to hire a car or book a taxi to see the sights.

The capital city, Wellington, was vibrant, bustling and full of life. It was the most accessible city that I visited on my trip.

I recommend getting your travel agent to book hotels in the very centre of the cities you visit. Investing in a Lonely Planet guidebook was also useful – it has a good section on disability and getting around NZ.

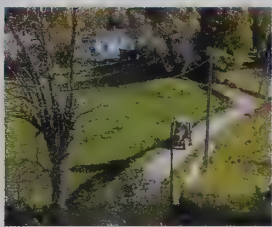
Disability aside, everyone should visit this amazing country, so they can experience everything that NZ has to offer. Planning is the key for disabled travellers; if you know what to expect, you can relax and enjoy it all the more.



Country of culture: Adam Stanton-Wharmby saw a geyser in Rotorua (above), Maori art (below, left) and went to the top of Auckland's Sky Tower (far left and the view from the top, below, right) while in NZ



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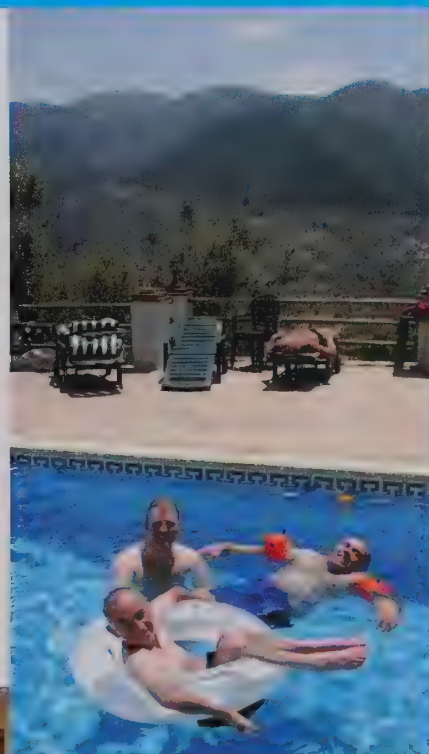
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Viva Las Vegas

From shopping and casinos to themed hotels and fountains, Las Vegas has so much happening that you need to fly over it to take it all in, which is what Helen Smith did during her spell in Sin City

Las Vegas isn't somewhere I would automatically choose to visit. When I go on holiday, I like peace and quiet and nice countryside.

However, I ski with the Uphill Ski Club and after a week skiing at Big Bear Ski Resort, the plan was to spend two days in Las Vegas before flying home. So, after a week in the snow, it was time to experience the throng of Vegas.

Driving from Big Bear in the San Bernardino mountain range to Vegas was an experience in itself. All you see for miles is rock. If you are travelling at dusk, you are likely to see a fantastic sunset behind the mountains.

When you enter Vegas it is a jaw-dropping sight. The extravagance of the hotels is just amazing. To get to our hotel we drove past a volcano display, a fountain and a pirate ship battle re-enactment.

We were staying at New York New York. As well as looking like the Manhattan

skyline, our hotel also had a roller-coaster going around it.

On arrival at the hotel, three members of our group who have difficulty walking hired motorised scooters to get around. But do be aware that if you leave your scooter parked anywhere for any length of time it might not be there when you get back, as hotel security has a tendency to remove them. However, this service is good for anyone who finds it difficult to walk the distances required to see Vegas properly.

My room in the hotel was a disabled room (or "handicapped", as the Americans still say).

The hotel had 50 accessible rooms in total and they cost from \$79.99 – if there is a big event happening in Vegas the prices shoot up.

I think the size of the room was akin to the floor space of my entire house. There was also a roll-in shower with a seat, and the taps were all levers.

My only criticism would be that all the group's rooms were on different floors and, as a large number of the party had learning difficulties, it meant a lot of time was spent trying to find people who had either wandered off or were lost. I was in room number 3033, which shows how big it was.

If you thought all there was to do in Vegas was gamble, you would be wrong – the most I spent was a couple of dollars on a few slot machines. There are so many other things to see and do.

But if gambling is your thing, you can do it 24/7. Although most casino tables were so high it would have meant me resting my chin on them, there were several at wheelchair height.

I also find dealing with coins pretty tricky, but you can put money on a card and use this in the slot machines instead.

If you want to spend your money gambling, everything

has been done to make it as easy as possible, whether you have a disability or not. I'm also pleased to say that one member of our group with a learning difficulty, who really enjoyed playing poker, was not completely fleeced at the casino tables. The people dealing the cards were doing their utmost to help.

So what is there to do if you don't want to gamble?

Well, just looking around the different hotels is an experience that many people go to Vegas for. Although all offer gambling, there are lots of shops, fountains and various other monuments to look at.

Most of our group went on a helicopter ride through the Grand Canyon. It is not exactly wheelchair-friendly – I had to climb the steps on my bum to get on the coach that took us there and then the steps to get onto the helicopter – but if you don't mind being manhandled it's certainly worth it.

The people running the trips will not help with lifting, so you will need to have someone with you to help.

However, the views of the Grand Canyon are breath-taking and it's something I'll remember for

the rest of my life.

Also in Vegas we went to see a performance of *Mamma Mia*. The guy pretending he was English was exceptionally funny to us. I found it a bit strange that most of the audience did not sing-along to the Abba songs, but it did not stop our party singing away.

We also visited the Coyote Ugly bar that featured in the film *Coyote Ugly*, which was in our hotel. There was a huge choice of restaurants. If you had the money you could eat or drink anything that your heart desired.

Vegas is an amazing place; I don't think there is anywhere else quite like it. It's certainly worth a trip, but after two days I was ready to go home to reality.

If you are interested in visiting Las Vegas, Nevada, there are some amazing deals if you book at the right time.

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Sky high: Aerial view over Las Vegas (below) and the Grand Canyon (above). The New York New York Hotel (below, left) and the famous Caesars Palace on the Vegas strip (top)



Awesome Asia



Lucy Howard explores the sights and sounds of south-east Asia

LINDA HOWARD

South-east Asia is often seen as a convenient stopover on the way to far-flung countries such as Australia and New Zealand, and many people merely stop in the airport for a few hours, or, at most, spend a night or two in a hotel before moving on. However, the diversity of cultures merits a longer exploration.

Bangkok provides a real assault on the senses and can be a bit of a culture shock at first. Cars and animals share roads with no apparent traffic rules;

whole families travel past on bicycles, and tuk tuks veer dangerously across the lanes, tooting their horns constantly. Street vendors sell unidentifiable local delicacies on every corner, and oppressive heat and smog envelop the city. But it's dynamic, colourful and exciting.

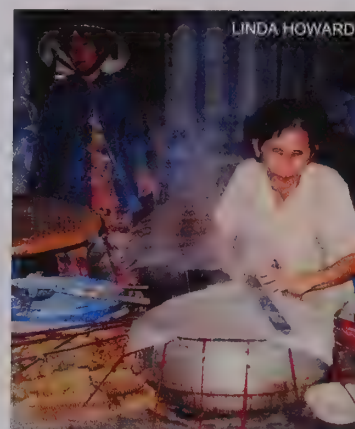
The bustling markets provide an ideal opportunity to bring home unique and inexpensive gifts such as locally-made handicrafts. You can also get clothes made for you at a fraction of UK prices, and often better quality too.



Clockwise from left: Gathering rice in rural Vietnam; Little India in Singapore; a blind woman making rice paper in Hoi An, Laos; the riverfront in Laos



LINDA HOWARD



LINDA HOWARD

A visit to one of the many temples is a must, such as the Grand Palace, with its elaborate green and red roofs housing huge gold Buddhas, which are guarded by the colourful statues outside. The air is thick with the smell of incense and the offerings of fruit and flowers.

Japan, like Bangkok, assaults you with the sheer volume of people and noise, but you soon get used to it. Tokyo is fascinating, with sleek hotels jostling for position besides slums along the river, and gleaming skyscrapers and

countless neon signs rising up all over the city.

The hustle and bustle of the city streets contrast sharply with the peace and tranquility of the gardens. Shinjuku Goyen is an oasis amid the chaos, with lakes, carved bridges, birdsong and beautiful colours, especially in spring when the trees are in blossom. Visit one of the floating teahouses for a bowl of creamy green tea overlooking the lake. There is an accessible toilet, and wheelchairs are available. As with many attractions in Tokyo and across Asia, disabled people

pay discounted entry – here it's 50 per cent off.

Tokyo bay is also beautiful, with the ever-expanding hotels creating an impressive skyline. The clean, fast and accessible Yurikamome skytrain winds round the city skyscrapers down to the bay, where, in addition to the waterfront hotels, there are huge shopping malls (accessible and blissfully air-conditioned) and an amusement park.

Train access is generally good, especially the skytrain and the Shinkansen "bullet" trains. About 70 per cent of Tokyo's stations are accessible (although Japan's regional areas fare less well). Stations often have lifts, ramps, Braille information and tactile paving, and onboard there are accessible spaces and toilets. Buses and the subway are less accessible, and English isn't widely spoken – signs and transport information are usually in Japanese. Accessible taxis can be booked.

Many modern buildings are wheelchair-accessible, including the proliferating skyscraper hotels such as the Park Hyatt, the setting for the film *Lost in Translation*. A high-speed lift whizzes you up to the 41st floor reception, and the New York Grill on the 52nd floor has awesome views over the city. Although expensive, it's worth lingering for a drink and watching the sun go down and the city lights come up, accompanied by a piano performance. Its decadence is a world away

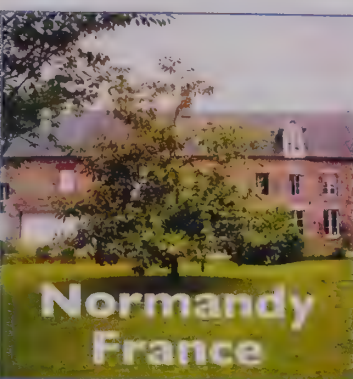
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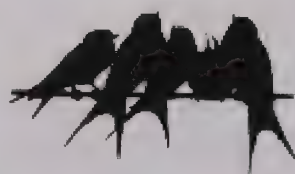
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Disabled people making music outside Angkor Wat (left); Angkor Wat temple (right)



from the busy streets below and the poverty of some areas.

Singapore also displays vast wealth and extreme poverty in equal measures. Because of its geographical location it's a melting pot of cultures, incorporating religions and languages from all over Asia. Chinatown and Little India give a real flavour of different cultures and cuisines, and there are interesting gifts and souvenirs here too. Chinatown is full of pastel-coloured houses and shopfronts with decorative signs, and Little India has temples with roofs covered with colourful carvings. As with Bangkok, the narrow, crowded

streets and the sheer volume of people make getting around difficult, but not impossible.

A must in Singapore is the famous Raffles hotel, a slice of old colonialism. Go to the bar's accessible outdoor terrace – which is surrounded by palm trees and gently tinkling waterfalls – and order a Singapore Sling. You'll find it hard to leave.

Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos may not seem such an obvious pick, but they provide some of the most unique south-east Asian experiences. Vietnam has become more popular since the

early 1980s and the end of the Vietnam War, and the economy is booming. There are many disabled people here, including people who have lost limbs to landmines, and children born with abnormalities as a result of Agent Orange and other chemicals sprayed on the land in the hope of destroying the Vietcong's ingenious tunnels and hideouts.

In much of rural Vietnam, there is beautiful, unspoilt countryside off the usual tourist radar, where you can see rice being collected in the fields using traditional methods that have been handed down through the generations.

The temple of Angkor Wat is one of Cambodia's most famous landmarks,

although largely inaccessible. Just outside Angkor Wat, I saw a group of disabled people (also injured by landmines) literally singing for their supper. In the markets of Hoi An in Laos, disabled people make handicrafts to sell to tourists. Steps are being made in the right direction, but disabled people still face an uphill struggle merely to survive.

However, at least here they are visible, and the continuing after-effects of the war and the problems disabled people face are made more apparent. In the more westernised cultures of Japan and Singapore, while there is better access provision (albeit patchy), the culture of "perfection" means there aren't many disabled people out and about – they are usually in care homes or cared for by families. Therefore, disability is mistakenly seen as a rarity. Although local people are often polite, courteous and helpful, you may sometimes be stared

at, as though you are a tourist attraction on your own holiday.

There is a whole world of experiences here, from ancient traditions to sleek modern skyscrapers, from shantytowns on the riverbank to gleaming hotels with rooftop bars, from opulent temples occupied by serene gold Buddhas to overcrowded roadside shacks occupied by many generations of the same family. It's a diverse and rewarding journey of discovery.

CONTACTS

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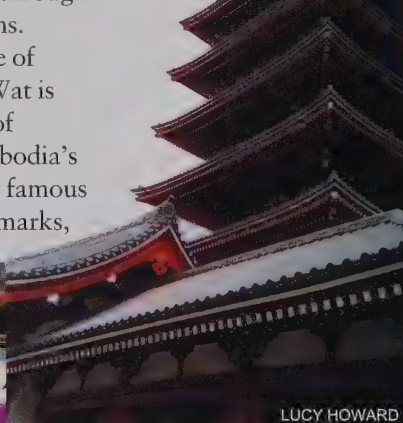
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LINDA HOWARD



LUCY HOWARD



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From left to right: Grand Palace, Bangkok; Singapore skyline; Senso-ji temple, Tokyo; Ginza, Tokyo



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The Ashley X treatment

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Mason . Sandy Collington . Jack Goulde . Barry Morgan . Rosemary Bolinger . Derek and Brenda Ashcroft . Tarek Elalfi
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Dean Thomas . Steve Tyrrell . Sarah Ashcroft . Gabrielle Hucker . Louise Jones . Maureen Reece . James A Reece

In a society that largely ignores disabled people, it has been hard to avoid the recent controversy about Ashley X, the American child who received radical medical and surgical procedures to prevent her from growing to adulthood.

We understand that the parents of disabled children face tough decisions to do what's best for their child. Often families do not receive the vital funding and support they need to ensure that they and their disabled child are not disadvantaged.

But we are committed to equality for disabled people and believe that everyone, regardless of their impairment or needs, has full and equal human rights.

Central to these human rights is that disabled children should not be prevented from growing into adults through medical intervention. That people believe this drastic and degrading action is necessary not only exposes the continuing prejudice against disabled people, but also highlights the everyday struggle that their families face. As a result of social barriers, prejudices and inadequate service provision, these families suffer from the financial hardship, stress and anxiety that can lead to such extreme decisions.

If we are to prevent potential abuse of the human rights of disabled children in the future then the Government must face up to the pressure families are under and increase the money and support available to them. Our society must adapt to the needs of all children, disabled and non-disabled alike. Children must not be adapted to fit our society.

We demand that the Government provides appropriate and adequate support to disabled people and their families and prohibits similar medical interventions in the UK.

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scope

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Scope is a national disability organisation whose focus is people with cerebral palsy. We deliver direct services and support to disabled people and their families. Our mission is to drive the change to make our society the first where disabled people achieve equality.

*Standard text rate applies.

Digital dating

Forget bars and supermarkets, the best place to meet people is online. From the comfort of your own home, you can chat to others around the world and screen potential partners without having to endure bad dates and uncomfortable silences. Ivy Broadhead investigates online dating sites for disabled people

Stars in the Sky

How many members?
Around 300.

All disabled members? Yes.

Nationwide? Only covers the London area.

Pan-impairment? Only people with learning difficulties.

When was it founded? About a year-and-a-half ago.

Who was it founded by? Lolita Jones, who has learning difficulties herself, came up with the idea as friends were already married and she was finding it difficult to find someone. Along with Pauline Geipel, she decided to set up her own dating agency, supported by Haringey Centre for Independent Living.

How much to join? £5 a year.

What makes this agency different? "As far as we know, it's the only dating and introduction agency for people with learning difficulties in the UK," says support worker, Syreeta McKay.

What does the agency provide for members? "Staff organise the date, make sure it's somewhere accessible for both people, and accompany them on the date, but give them room, and let them take it from there. There are also social events like trips to the theatre, bowling, the cinema or going out for dinner, all depending on demand. We generally get between 6 to 40 members coming along, accompanied by staff members and one or both of Lolita and Pauline," says Syreeta.

Success stories? William Fox met his girlfriend Ramona through Stars in the Sky, and they have now been together for six months.

"We had an outing to Battersea Park, I asked for her number and took it from there," says William. Before joining the agency, he had felt used in past relationships, but now "it's going really, really well. It's made a massive difference," he says.

● Stars in the Sky, tel: 020 8809 4442 or visit: www.starsinthesky.co.uk



Cupid Calls

How many members? "We used to have about 1,000, but the site was recently hacked, so we're now having to start all over again. We currently have about 200 members," says founder, Mark Esho.

All disabled members? Membership is about 70 per cent disabled and 30 per cent non-disabled.

Nationwide? Members from all over the world, but predominantly from the UK, where it is based.

Pan-impairment? Yes.

When was it founded? Three years ago.

Who was it founded by? Mark Esho, who is disabled, thought of the idea.

"I've got a lot of friends who are disabled, and had trouble meeting people," he says.

How much to join? Membership is free, as the website is run on a voluntary basis.

What does the agency provide for members? "Cupid Calls is a forum that allows people to meet over the internet with instant messaging, chatrooms and the option to post photos and videos to create your own profile," says Mark. "Cupid Calls offers a safe, highly confidential environment where people from all walks of life can interact and find love." They do not hold any social events.

● Cupid Calls, visit: www.cupidcalls.co.uk

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 ● Cupid Calls, visit: www.cupidcalls.co.uk



International websites

Dating and introduction agencies tend to operate on a face-to-face basis, rather than over the internet, but there are also a number of websites specifically aimed at disabled singles.

Many international dating websites for disabled people are popular in the UK.

- www.datealittle.com is a dating website specifically for people of restricted growth. It is based in the United States (US) but has members all over the world.
- www.whispers4u.com is a US site that has members with a range of impairments, or "life challenges" as it terms them, as well as non-disabled people open to dating disabled people.
- www.lovebyrd.com is a virtual community which offers personal ads, chatrooms and other resources for disabled people.
- www.disability-dating.com has discussion boards, photo ads and relevant articles.
- www.disabledpassions.com (pictured, right) is a free dating and social networking community for disabled singles.
- www.disabledunited.com is a dating, friendship and travel site with forums and chatrooms.
- www.disableddatingclub.com is an international dating site for disabled people.



Play it safe, says Simon

Simon Parritt, chartered counselling psychologist and *DN's* relationships columnist, urges anyone dating online to consider the basic safety issues before meeting up with someone you have met through a dating agency or website.

"Make sure someone knows where you are going, meet in a public place, and maybe get someone to call you halfway through so you can escape if you need to."

Even if things seem to be going well, he warns not to jump in too soon.

"Ask questions if people are cagey – are there areas where they haven't told you things they should?"

Most of all, he says, don't assume you're going to meet your soulmate on the first date you go on.

"You have to kiss a lot of frogs, so don't get too drawn into it. You will make mistakes."

Outsiders

How many members? Between 600 and 800.

All disabled members? Predominantly disabled and socially isolated people.

Nationwide? Yes.

Pan-impairment? Caters for people with physical and social impairments.

When was it founded? 28 years ago.

Who was it founded by? Tuppy Owens, who says:

"It came from meeting a couple of recently disabled people, and I helped them get back on their feet socially, and find a girlfriend, and it was just a real good laugh!"

How much to join? £25 for employed people and £12 for unemployed people.

What makes this agency different? "We're much more of a self-help group than a dating agency; we're pioneering and campaigning. A lot of disabled people have problems with body image and self-worth, and we try to help them to see that they can run their own lives, that there's a family of us who are in the same position," says Tuppy.

What does the agency provide for members? "There are social lunches in London and the Midlands every month, Ipswich bimonthly and the West Country every few months," says Tuppy. "Volunteers organise the events and either go along themselves, or leave it to the members to go alone. The Outsiders magazine, *Inside*, provides details on upcoming social events run by Outsiders and other relevant organisations, as well as useful information aimed at disabled readers. The new Outsiders website, soon to be launched, will have online forums and separate pages for regional event listings. We also have a sex and disability helpline for disabled people and health professionals."



Success stories? Eleni Stephani, who has cerebral palsy, met her partner Phil Nicol (pictured together, left) through Outsiders a couple of years ago, and they have now been in a serious relationship for about a year.

"We're living separately, but we're together, and it's getting better as time goes on," says Eleni.

Both had found problems having relationships in the past.

"No-one really liked me, I wasn't really confident."

Outsiders helped me gain confidence," Eleni says, and

Phil agrees. "No-one had been interested since I started using the chair," he says.

The experience of meeting other disabled people through Outsiders has been a positive one for Phil.

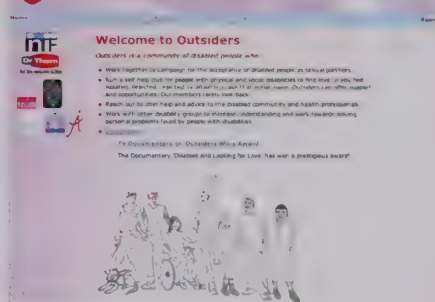
"You're one of a vast swathe of disabled people, instead of one guy in a wheelchair getting stared at."

The couple have made a lot of friends through Outsiders social events, and Eleni has now started volunteering with the group.

"It's more than good fun – it increases one's understanding of being disabled," she says.

● Outsiders, tel: 020 8354 8291 or visit: www.outsiders.org.uk

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Valentine on a budget

Proving your love does not have to break the bank. Elizabeth Choppin reveals some thoughtful ways to romance your sweetheart, without costing you the earth

So Valentine's Day is fast approaching, and you haven't got the cash for diamonds, a weekend in Paris or Beluga caviar. Not to fret. The experts insist that it isn't pricey gifts and trips that will make your sweetheart swoon.

According to disability sex and relationship guru, Tuppy Owens, founder of The Outsiders Club, it is good, old-fashioned thought and consideration that counts.

Home-made cards and presents, strumming a song on a guitar, making an effort to set the mood with scented candles... these are the things that show you really care.

"It doesn't matter how much it costs – it's how it is presented," says Tuppy.

Going out

If money is tight, Tuppy suggests impressing your date with an outing to one of the free museum exhibitions in your area. Visit: www.museums.co.uk

Also, many of the UK's stately homes have gardens that can be accessed for free, which would be perfect for a romantic stroll – weather permitting. Tel: 01952 852 200 or visit: www.stately-homes.com

Another option is to contact your local authority or the Disabled Ramblers Association to find out what accessible winter walks are available in your area. Visit: www.disabledramblers.co.uk

Laughter is often the best remedy, especially when you want to ensure you have the perfect date. There are comedy shows on around the UK, many of them free or at a very low cost. Visit: www.chortle.co.uk or www.bbc.co.uk/whatson/tickets

Leave the kids with a babysitter, so you and your partner can enjoy each other's company. Take a stroll through the park or along the beach. Find a spot where you can watch the sun set and don't forget to take a flask of something warm – coffee, tea or hot chocolate with a splash of Baileys to warm those winter evenings – and pretend the world has stopped, if only for a few hours.



Thoughtful gestures

Make chocolate-covered strawberries for your date, it is a quick and easy recipe – even for those who don't cook

- Wash, dry and refrigerate one punnet of fresh strawberries
- For the chocolate dip, melt two quality bars of chocolate in a pot with two tablespoons of double cream. Cook over a low heat, stir and add more cream until you achieve the desired consistency and taste
- Dip strawberries into chocolate and put them on a tray covered with wax paper
- Refrigerate until hardened and serve with a glass of sparkling Italian wine such as Prosecco Marca Trevigiano, £3.49 from Lidl

Make a photo collage to remind your loved one of the memories you have shared

- Take a sturdy piece of cardboard, which can be recycled from a box, and trim neatly around the edges with scissors or a box cutter
- Fix pictures (or photocopies of the pictures) onto the board with glue. Feel free to be creative and arrange them in a whimsical way – they don't have to be in rows!
- For effect, add cute stickers, glitter and bows. Remember, this is the one day of the year you're allowed to be naff, so relish it!

If you can't afford to buy flowers or a gift, or you don't have pictures for a collage, how about making a set of love coupons for your partner instead?

- Cut any sort of red, pink or white paper into small squares, circles or hearts
- For each coupon, write down something that your partner can "cash in" later that doesn't cost anything – such as a massage, a foot rub, a hug, getting off the dishes for a week...
- Put the coupons inside a little box or bag, tie it with a bow, and present it to your Valentine

It is the thought that counts....and the best way to someone's heart can be through their stomach, so combine the two and cook your sweetheart their favourite meal.

You could recreate something special you shared together: Relive the memory of the meal you had on your first date, the cocktails you drank on your honeymoon or the dessert you shared on an anniversary. Don't forget to make it really romantic with candle-light and soft music.

Staying in

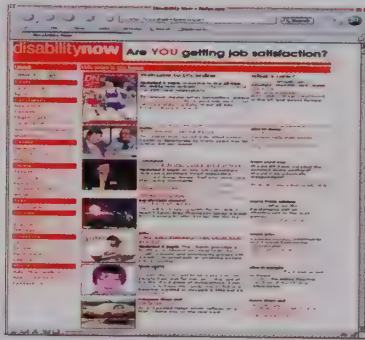
If you would rather cozy up indoors with your Valentine, set the ambiance with some of these simple, but effective, ideas:

- Do a romantic room makeover before the big night
- If you've got a fireplace, make sure it's lit
- Light any candles you have lying around and transform the room into a cozy love den. Scented candles are especially good at setting the mood
- Make a mixed CD with all of your favourite love songs and play it on repeat
- Make a card out of red coloured paper, with a love poem inside (www.love-poems.me.uk). If you're brave, recite the poem aloud
- Have romantic DVDs, such as *Wuthering Heights*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sleepless in Seattle* and *An Affair To Remember*, around in case conversation goes stale. DVD by mail services work really well. Tel: 0845 310 5003 or visit: www.tescodvdrental.com. You could also borrow DVDs from friends and family instead of hiring them
- Treat each other to a sensual back rub or foot massage. For tips and tricks, visit: www.wikihow.com/Give-a-Relaxing-Massage

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abnormally FUNNY

Cannabis could revolutionise the doctor-patient relationship, says Gareth Berliner

Hello DN readers. I'm Gareth Berliner from Abnormally Funny People.

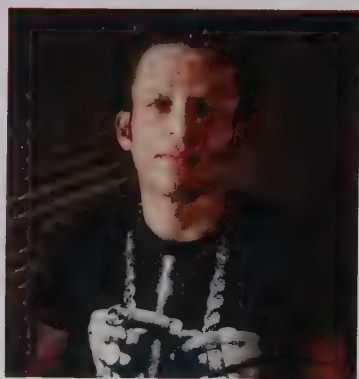
I'm a stand-up comedian who's had most of his intestines removed. Now they say it takes a lot of guts to do stand-up comedy but I like to think I'm proof it really doesn't.

Knowing I had to write this column I thought I'd better check the contents of the magazine online. My eyes were drawn instantly to DN's campaign for medicinal cannabis to be made available on prescription.

Now this is a cause I'm more than willing to join. I've used cannabis in the past both recreationally and medicinally.

When I'm in hospital I'm known to sit in my car in the car park escaping the MRSA bugs while relaxing with a joint.

Last time I was an inpatient I went down to my car with a drip attached on a drip



'Hospitals, they're the biggest and most dangerous kind of drug dealer because their supply is never-ending'

stand. I fed the IV line through the car window and sat there having a quiet smoke. Of course, this left the drip standing alone outside the vehicle.

Unbelievably, people seeing me sitting alone in the vehicle actually knocked on the window to ask if I was leaving the space. YES OF COURSE I'M LEAVING, I drive

everywhere with a drip stand attached to my car!

Cannabis is a medicinal aid, although it's not an aid to motivation. Had I smoked a joint before writing this column it would have read more like:

Hey, alright. I'm Gareth. Hope you're having a good day. I fancy some chocolate and some crisps. Do you remember the *Six Million Dollar Man*...wasn't he great....the way he jumped and everything....really cool. *Hong Kong Phooey*...he was cool....it was always the cat that solved the case....Garfield was a cat....I like cats....so does Andrew Lloyd Webber...he did a musical about it and everything.... Right....I'm gonna play *Superman* on the X-box now...as soon as I can move..... Superman....He's cool...and an orphan too....that's sad. See ya.....

Being honest, the strongest drug I've ever taken is diamorphine (refined heroin). That sounds pretty heavy right? My dealer at the time provided grade A opiates to all and sundry. Beautiful women looked after me and my dealer saw to it that I was provided with food and drink on a regular basis. That's the NHS for you!

Hospitals, they're the biggest and most dangerous kind of drug dealer because their supply is never-ending and legal and no-one seems to worry about it.

But...back to that medicinal cannabis debate. I can't imagine going to the doctor and him saying, "Right, Mr Berliner, I recommend a couple of hits from the bong and two joints a day for the next week."

If things do change politically we may well see the end of an apple a day keeping the doctor away. We'll just spark up a spliff and forget we ever needed the doctor in the first place!

*For details of future Abnormally Funny People gigs, visit: www.abnormallyfunnypeople.com

WORLD VIEW

TOM SHAKESPEARE

Holocaust commemorations will remember the 250,000 disabled people murdered by the Nazis

Each January 27, Holocaust Memorial Day commemorates the victims of Nazi persecution and coincides with the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

In recent years, it is heartening to see that this UN initiative has given increasing space to disabled victims of the Nazis, given that this aspect of the tragedy is not widely known. The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust recently commissioned research by YouGov that showed that 55 per cent of people were not aware that disabled people were victims of Nazi persecution, highlighting the importance of this day.

Hitler's prejudice against disabled people was evident in *Mein Kampf* and the Nazis instituted a sterilisation law after taking power in 1933. Hundreds of thousands of Germans with supposedly heritable impairments were prevented from having children and from marrying. But the full atrocity did not commence until the outbreak of war, when a secret order from Hitler set up a euthanasia programme, known as T4.

Driven to their deaths: Buses used to transport disabled people to the Hadamar euthanasia centre

Over the next two years, a bureaucracy of murder was organised. Each residential institution sent reports on the disabled people they cared for. A team of doctors reviewed the cases and decided, without even meeting them, whether they should live or die. SS buses arrived at each institution, and drove victims – the majority of whom had mental health problems or learning difficulties – to killing centres.

The techniques used – for example, gas chambers followed by cremation – were later transferred to the Jewish victims of the Final Solution. Over 70,000 people died during the T4 programme, together with 5,000 children in a separate scheme, and many thousands more in less organised euthanasia throughout Eastern Europe and Nazi-occupied Russia. In

total, perhaps 250,000 disabled people were murdered.

Doctors, nurses, orderlies, lawyers and others collaborated with the effort to eliminate so-called "lives unworthy of life", and few were punished for their crimes.

I was honoured to be asked to contribute to the 2007 UK commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day, which will be held on Sunday, 28 January in Newcastle.

I will have just returned from a trip to Germany, where I will be retracing my father's journeys to Bavaria for medical treatment in the years 1933-1935. I find it a chilling irony that he was attending a clinic promising to cure dwarfism, at a time when Germans were being sterilised for having impairments including his own.

My father's doctor was a Nazi – like most German

doctors of the time – and a close friend of Rudolf Hess; I have a photograph of my grandfather meeting leading Nazis Hess and

Martin Borman.

While I am in Munich, I also intend to visit the Dachau Concentration Camp, on the outskirts of the city, and Elgging-Haar, the hospital where hundreds of disabled children were poisoned or starved to death, which is still a residential institution. Seeing these sites will make the ceremony even more meaningful for me.

Holocaust Memorial Day is an opportunity to honour the victims of the Nazis, and challenge contemporary abuses against disabled people, and other minorities.

The theme of the 2007 event is The Dignity of Difference. It will focus on harmony between communities and universal human rights. The slogan "Same. But Different" is intended to promote multiculturalism and respect for others. Events will happen throughout the country. For more information visit: www.hmd.org.uk

Tom is writing a memoir about disability, genetics and eugenics

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Will London really be ready for 2012?

In *DN* last month, Allen Bergson (*below*) revealed how inaccessible most central London hotels are. But accommodation is not the only cause for concern in the run-up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Ruth Bashall says more must be done on access, while David Morris says London will be ready

'Unless things change drastically, much of London's access will be inconsistent'



Allen Bergson's article (*DN*, January, pages 28-29) highlighted how many

London hoteliers aren't providing the basics for disabled guests – but accommodation is only one of the issues that needs drastic action.

People coming to the Olympic and Paralympic Games won't just want to watch the events or cheer on their home team, they will want the whole experience – to enjoy London's historic buildings, go for a trip up river, eat varied cuisine or enjoy a show. They will need transport. They will need to go to the toilet. They will need information.

London is a much easier city for disabled people than it was 20 years ago. It is better than most capital cities, and it is improving. But unless things change drastically, much of the access will be inconsistent, and disabled visitors may face discriminatory attitudes. Many places may cope with one or two of us, but not with a whole team of blind Paralympians visiting London's hotspots.

Access is a hit and miss affair,

but how much more difficult will it be when the city is bursting with Games visitors?

My biggest worry is transport – the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) has a plan, but its biggest challenge is that most Underground and local rail services are inaccessible. Stratford station will be accessible (well, most of it, but how long will the queue for the lifts be?), but most central tube stations won't be.

Transport for London and the ODA can tackle the barriers by providing lots of well-trained volunteers to assist disabled passengers and good quality accessible information.

But the mayor, ODA, Visit London and other public bodies need to get tough on access. They must work in partnership with disabled people to get things moving fast.

We need a plan for tackling discrimination before the Olympics and Paralympics – not just statements about diversity, but an assessment of the barriers, and the money to fix them. It will pay off in the long run, as London becomes known as an accessible place to live, work and visit – long after the Games have ended.

Ruth Bashall is a diversity trainer and consultant and co-chair of an east London organisation of disabled people



'London has seen improvements driven by the mayor's commitment to equality'



Getting around most capital cities can be a nightmare for a disabled person and as a disabled Londoner I want my city to be the envy of the world in 2012 for inclusion and access.

I was excited about London winning the right to stage the Olympics and Paralympic Games, not just for the Games themselves – however great it will be to have such a major sporting event on my doorstep – but also for their legacy as a force for real change and improvement to the lives of disabled and Deaf Londoners.

Over the last five years London has seen improvements, driven by the mayor Ken Livingstone's commitment to equality for disabled and Deaf people. Every bus is now accessible and there is training for drivers so that they are more aware of disabled passengers' needs. This means I now regularly use buses, the tube and Docklands Light Railway – a major change in my life. At the same time, planning powers are being used to increase the number of accessible homes and improve inclusive urban design.

The provision of an "accessible network" is an integral part of the mayor's transport plan and, although it will not be possible to deliver a transport system that is fully accessible at every station in time for the Games, the

Olympic Delivery Authority is working to develop an accessible network of transport services to serve all Games venues so that everyone is able to get to the Games, where all Olympic venues will be fully accessible.

But we still face barriers at hotels and restaurants, in spite of legislation. I could bring a case under the Disability Discrimination Act every week about premises whose design unlawfully denies me access. Perhaps organisations, and especially public bodies, should consider disability access when they are procuring other venues.

The mayor has said he wants London to host the most accessible Olympic and Paralympic Games ever, and we will continue to challenge disablism and support good practice, so that London can welcome disabled people from across the world. As part of this process there are forums so that disabled people and others can have a say and get involved. I would also welcome *DN* readers' views* on what will be necessary to make an accessible Olympics.

David Morris is a senior policy adviser on disability to the mayor of London

*Email your views to: david.morris@london.gov.uk (please include contact details)

KEY NOTES

ANDY RICKELL

Everyone's personal experience of disability varies



It is likely that the next prime minister – whether it is Gordon Brown or David Cameron – will have a disabled child.

There can be no doubt that this will put the issues faced by the parents of disabled children right at the heart of government. But we need to acknowledge that each parent has to make a variety of choices. For instance, some people would agree with David Cameron's decision to enrol his child in a special school and others would not.

Gordon and David's personal experiences will give them some understanding, but they need to use that as a starting point. If they really want to understand the diversity of parents' experiences they cannot assume that their own

experience equips them to understand all of the issues.

Similarly, we need to acknowledge that the experiences of every parent of a disabled child is different to the experiences of disabled people themselves. Both

'They cannot assume that their own experience equips them to understand all of the issues'

experiences are valid, but what they enable us to know and understand about disability is different.

So when we are learning about disability from each other, we need to remember whose experiences are most valid in particular circumstances, and ensure we include the full range

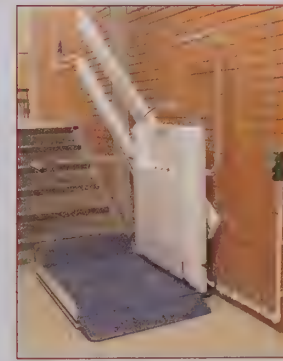
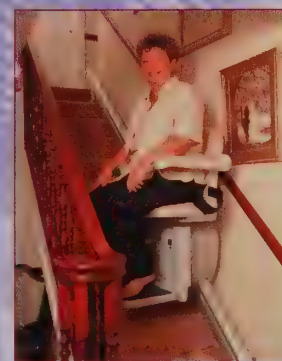
of representative experiences when seeking to understand the full diversity of disability.

As a member of Equality 2025 – the new body set up to inform government disability policy development – I know we have a responsibility to seek and reflect disabled people's views across the whole disabled community.

This of course has implications every time government and decision-makers consult people about disability. Disabled people need to represent disabled people's issues, parents their issues and disabled children and young people theirs, and we need to remember to include each other's experiences to create the overall picture. Complicated, but then so is life!

Andy is executive director for diversity, politics and planning at Scope

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Inclusion 'not for everyone'

Interesting to read David Cameron's article (*DN*, December 2006, pages 22-23).

As a parent in a similar situation, I agree with the points he made.

I note that some people make the point that he might not yet fully understand the policy of inclusion and the struggle that disabled people have gone through and are going through in this area.

One commentator says that maybe in a few years he will come to understand this. While rejoicing in the good work done by those who seek inclusion, please do not forget that there are many for whom this is not appropriate and sadly never will be.

Andrew Wallace, by email

I have just read the interview with David Cameron in the December edition of *DN* and was appalled at the comments made by Andy Rickell of Scope, suggesting Cameron should "acquire a more thorough understanding of

the social model".

I am the parent of an 11-year-old who has cerebral palsy (CP) with profound disabilities and needs. She requires 24-hour care and at times has complex medical requirements, which has seen her hospitalised for long periods.

I would suggest Mr Rickell would do well to see the perspective of other parents of disabled children who have to live 24-hours-a-day the way we, our children and families have to live. Inclusion is not the solution to all the problems of all those with disabilities. One size does not fit all requirements.

David Cameron and his family are living the experience of many parents of disabled children with CP, and when he says practical and medical issues should be given a priority, he is right.

Robert Grover, address withheld

● See Andy Rickell's column on listening to all experiences of disability, page 41.

Treatment of Ashley X was 'shocking'

I am absolutely appalled and disgusted to hear of the so-called "treatment" given to Ashley X, a nine-year-old girl from Seattle, USA, with static encephalopathy, a condition that has left her quadriplegic, unable to talk and with a mental age of three months.

Her parents allowed doctors to perform surgery (hysterectomy, double mastectomy and appendicectomy) and administer hormones so as to restrict her maturity and weight to what it is now. This, they say, will make lifting and bathing easier and improve her quality of life.

Why stop there? Remove her teeth – she'll never be able to brush them. Amputating her arms and legs would make dressing easier, and since she's incontinent, why not give her a urostomy and colostomy?

Oh yes, and while she's on the operating table could you do a "nose job", as it really would improve her smile? In return, one of her kidneys could be "harvested" for the hospital's transplant programme.

I hope this form of intervention is never permitted in this country.

Chris Channon MBE, Nottingham

As the story of Ashley X broke, I could hardly believe what I

was hearing. Imagine if such measures were ever suggested for non-disabled children to keep them manageable – there would be outrage.

Ashley (*right*) is a little girl not dissimilar to my own daughter, who is now aged 19 and is a lovely young woman with cerebral palsy. We have a hoist, personal assistants provided by direct payments, an accessible car and a tailor-made wheelchair. My daughter has attended mainstream schools and enjoys romantic films, is due to attend our local mainstream college and has a small circle of friends who visit her. I'm not saying life is easy but we do have a good life.

How shocking that the richest nation in the world could not provide some of the most basic support to help Ashley's family live as ordinary a life as possible.

Ashley had no legal representation and her difficulties in communication were dismissed as if she could not communicate at all.

Support for families like ours ought to be a human right (just like getting prescription glasses).

Preethi Manuel, parent representative on the Council for Disabled Children; trustee of Disability Equality in Education



As a charity dedicated to improving the opportunities and lives of disabled people, Enham believes disabled people should be accepted by society and that this is a fundamental human right.

We support advances in medical science, where genuine improvement to a person's quality of life would result. We acknowledge the dilemma faced by the parents in the case of Ashley X. However, with the right social care and support for the family, the medical alterations administered could have been viewed as unnecessary.

Despite recent progress, this case illustrates the ongoing fragility of the rights and status of disabled people in society. Enham believes all people should be respected for their own unique qualities.

Mike Smith, chief executive, Enham

Reserving post 'discriminates'

I was surprised and dismayed to read your editorial in the December issue (*DN*, December 2006, page 3) telling us about the advert for the post of editor.

Surely reserving the post for a disabled person is showing the very prejudice we fight so hard to stop. I would agree that the new editor should have a

wide understanding of disabled issues but many people have that experience who are non-disabled.

You are displaying the very trait that we all deplore and also potentially losing candidates who would do the job very well – possibly even the best person for the job.

Sue Ferreira, by email

Comparison to Holocaust was 'absolutely deplorable'

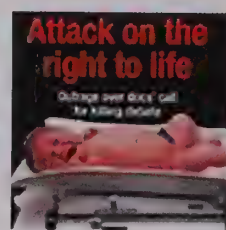
Bill Carruthers (*DN* January, letters, pages 38-39) may not agree with the suggestions made by the obstetricians in relation to severely disabled babies, but I absolutely deplore the way he linked the issue with the Holocaust.

May I correct him on one point. There are, as he noted, three recognised Nazi extermination/death camps. But Treblinka was the third, not Auschwitz-Birkenau, which started as a concentration camp and later developed into a mixed camp. A proportion of people deported there were spared the gas chambers, to provide cheap labour for German factories.

Among those who survived the camp were two of my aunts.

That aside, there's a world of difference between withholding treatment to spare suffering, leaving things up to God or "letting nature take its course", and what the Nazis did. I don't think the activities of the Nazis were motivated by a desire to reduce suffering. And I don't think they consulted with the families before deciding people's fates.

Ellen Goudsmit, by email



Power to bus drivers

I am writing in response to the letter from Mrs Hopkinson (*DN*, December 2006, letters, pages 20-21).

Like her I am a wheelchair-user and have waited at bus-stops for low-floor, wheelchair-accessible buses to arrive, only to be told, "sorry, no room," and watch the bus pull off again.

The solution to this problem is to have more than one wheelchair space fitted on the bus and a change in the Disability Discrimination Act to give bus drivers the power to force non-disabled people to move out of wheelchair bays.

Roger Budden, Liss, Hampshire

Liddle's logic flawed

Why has *DN* given the boorish Rod Liddle the oxygen of publicity and a forum to revel in his unapologetic views on racism and disablism (*DN* January, page 37)? He obviously hasn't learnt that just because you can do something, it doesn't mean you should.

Had he ever had to put up with such abuse he would hopefully see the error in his so-called logic.

Chris Page, Hertfordshire

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About time we got flights right

I had the opportunity to go abroad in March last year for the first time in my wheelchair and travelled with BMI Baby. The care I received at Birmingham airport was very good, but when I got to my destination, Palma Airport, my wheelchair was damaged. I made the mistake of not reporting it because I was tired. I rented an apartment in Puerto Pollensa, which was excellent. I found the details in DN. On my return a week later, I had to wait 30 minutes on the aircraft because the equipment had been allocated

to another plane. When I eventually got through customs, my wheelchair was brought to me in pieces and my bag was missing. I was fortunate to have my friend with me, but the experience was very alarming. I agree we need legal protection. Wheelchairs, especially electric ones like mine, cost a great deal of money and we need to know we have the right to go to the airline with any complaint and that they will be accountable. Mrs M Bycroft, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands

Shakespeare's book going digital soon

The delay in providing digital access to my book, *Disability Rights and Wrongs*, is due to the publisher, not myself. I am assured that it will be available as an e-book at: www.ebookstore.tandf.co.uk/html/index.asp very shortly, and my publishers and I sincerely apologise to Colin Fowler (DN, December 2006, letters, pages 20-21) and other visually impaired or dyslexic colleagues who are eager to read it for themselves. Tom Shakespeare

Clamp down on scooters

Class one scooters with a top speed of four mph are far more dangerous than class three scooters. They charge ahead and push into pedestrians. All scooters should have a fluorescent jacket around the seat back and the rider should also have to wear one. Every scooter-user should have an hour's tuition before purchase and everyone selling scooters should be registered with their council to get rid of backstreet cowboys selling poorly-repaired scooters. Mr V C Barnes, Attleborough, Norfolk

web watch

Have your say and join others chatting at www.disabilitynow.org.uk

Why shouldn't blue badge holders park in parents' bays?

I have just returned from my local Sainsbury's and I'm FURIOUS! On returning to my car, I found a notice that said I had parked in a "parents' bay" and that someone had complained as I had no children with me. It went on to say that my registration number had been noted and that I should not "repeat the offence". Maggie B

When my local Sainsbury's was being refitted it told those using parent bays they were out of use and they should use the disabled bays. I had to shop elsewhere during that time as I could never get in. I occasionally will use the parents' bays and stick my blue badge in the window if all of the disabled bays are full. Those with children can generally walk across a car park if they supervise and care for the children in an appropriate manner. Sheeps

Having a child is a temporary problem – a child will not be in a pushchair forever. You can't tar everyone with the same brush, there are some really lovely people out there, but you always seem to find that the people misusing disabled bays are obnoxious. I find it difficult to believe that you were tackled over parking in a parents' bay at all, but perhaps you live in an area where parking is at a premium. The supermarket is trying to get as many customers through its doors as possible. By offering parent and child spaces, mums go there because it is easy. And, if there isn't a big space for their family wagon, they may park in a disabled space. It seems that having children is the new disability. I suggest that it was probably the lazy mum brigade that stuck a notice on your car, the ones that have forgotten that they have adequate mobility and having kids is sometimes inconvenient when you want to shop. Liz Williams

backchat

Regular readers of this column – if there are any – will know there is little *backchat* likes more than a tasty slice of irony.

So when an email arrived announcing the appointment of a new non-executive chair for Rempoy, the irony sensors started to gently vibrate.

The decision to appoint Ian Russell to the post was made by John Hutton, secretary of state for work and pensions. The same John Hutton, of course, who refuses to extend winter fuel payments to severely disabled people under the age of 60.

Backchat is certain that all of the Rempoy employees who would qualify for such a payment – in the unlikely event that Mr Hutton ever sees sense – would be reassured to discover that, until last February, Mr Russell was chief executive of Scottish Power, the UK's fifth biggest energy supplier.

Yes, that's right, the same Scottish Power that was responsible for a series of hefty price hikes in gas and electricity prices under the rule of Mr Russell...

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Audi's all-round achiever



Motoring correspondent Helen Smith found it difficult to dislike anything about Audi's A4 Avant, which has more than enough room for driver's adaptations, assistance dogs or a wheelchair



BOB HOBBS PHOTOGRAPHY

At the start of the year Audi became the 33rd car manufacturer to join the Motability car scheme – this scheme enables disabled people to use their mobility allowance to obtain a new car.

At the moment there are only two models to choose from: the Audi A3, which is a three or five-door hatchback, and the Audi A4, which is a saloon or an estate.

However, with all the different combinations of model, fuel and transmission there are a total of 54 different Audi specifications on the scheme.

Advance payment prices range from £3,104 to £9,462, depending on the model.

The Audi I tested was the A4 Avant 2.0 TDi SE, which is a manual diesel estate.

This car on a three-year lease has an advance payment of £6,867. I was unable to drive it myself as it had no driving adaptations, but Martin Ellison from Motability Operations (pictured with Helen above, left) kindly took me out for a spin.

Audi is perceived to be a prestigious brand and it certainly lived up to my expectations. I was very

impressed with how it looked, and with the smoothness of the ride.

With a 2.0 engine, this car had plenty of acceleration and handled the country roads with no trouble at all.

Inside, there was plenty of headroom and very little engine noise. I also felt very comfortable on my leather seat.

I sat in the driver's seat when we stopped to see how it felt and there was lots of leg room and space around the steering wheel, which is important for anyone who needs to attach hand controls.

'Audi is perceived to be a prestigious brand and it certainly lived up to my expectations'

I found the dials easy to read and the majority of the stereo and air conditioning controls were press button.

I also was pleased to find that the doors opened wide, so there was plenty of room to get in and out.

My assistance dog Yancey tested out the boot space for me and found there was plenty of room to lie down.

A manual wheelchair would



also fit in the boot without any trouble but a powerchair would be a bit more of a squeeze, depending on its size.

It's hard to find anything I didn't like about the Audi A4; apart from the price, that is.

However, when BMW first joined the scheme in April 2005 their advance payments started at around £3,000, but now they start at £899. Motability hopes that Audi advance payments, like BMW, will also become lower in time.

My favourite Audi is the sporty TT and I was disappointed that this model isn't on the scheme. I'm told it's because this car has high insurance costs and it is too expensive for Motability to insure.

Audi is the last mainstream car manufacturer to join the Motability scheme and with this addition there are now over 4,000 makes and models available for customers to choose from.

• For more information on the Motability scheme, tel: 0800 093 1000 or visit: www.motability.co.uk

• For more information on Audi cars, visit: www.audi.co.uk

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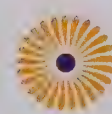
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Dear Rachel

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Rachel Wilson, who is disabled herself, has spent many years advising on disability matters. Write to her at *Disability Now*, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW or email your problem to editor@disabilitynow.org.uk



Holiday options

I want to plan a holiday with my sister who has MS and is severely disabled. She currently lives in Lancashire. We need suitable accommodation that has a ceiling hoist. Do you have any suggestions? We would like to go to Broadstairs, or to somewhere within half an hour of there.
Colin, Canada

Although the choice of accessible holiday accommodation is increasing, it is still in short supply, particularly accommodation which is equipped with the ceiling hoist that you require.

Generally speaking, accommodation with that level of adaptation still tends to be limited to specialist holiday centres specifically for disabled people. These are run by organisations such as Vitalise (formerly the Winged Fellowship Trust).

Their focus is on holidays with organised excursions,

which is not what I think you had in mind, and they do not have a centre near Broadstairs. However, they may be able to offer advice as to venues with hoists.

I suggest you contact Holiday Care, as they have information on accessible accommodation throughout the UK, including details of the accessibility rating of each venue.

It might also be worth contacting the MS Society, either in the UK or its equivalent in Canada, to see whether they have any specific travel advice for people with MS.

● *Holiday Care/Tourism for All*, tel: 0845 124 9971 (UK only), textphone: 0845 124 9976 or visit: www.holidaycare.org.uk

● *MS Society*, tel: 020 8438 0700 or visit: www.mssociety.org.uk

Rights on long flights

We have a young child with cerebral palsy and scoliosis. We always travel with our older

children and would like to continue to do this on a trip to New Zealand.

The thought of the flight is daunting because an ordinary airline seat is not good for our child's posture.

Is it possible for him to remain in his wheelchair, or at least in his adapted car seat? We have asked airlines previously and been told it is "not safe".
David, Devon

Most airlines will require your son to be parted from his own chair prior to boarding and would not let him remain seated in it on board.

Some airlines would allow you to be seated either in the front row where there is more legroom or, in some cases, upgrade you to business class, which might ease his posture problems.

However, I understand that this does not fully address the question of his scoliosis on a long-haul flight; I would argue that your son has a medical need to be

If the shoe fits...

I am an above-the-knee amputee and after ten years of trying to wear my prosthesis, I took it back to the Limb Centre last week. This week I threw away all my unused right shoes, slippers and boots.

I was wondering if there was an organisation or charity which collects unused shoes. There must be someone who has had their left leg amputated and would be interested in having a brand new shoe/boot/slipper.

Do you know of anyone who might be interested in having my spare shoes?

Annie, by email

You are not the first person to raise this issue. I have looked on the website of the Limbless Association and they suggest that people contact Sole Mates, a charity which supplies (and no doubt would be glad to accept) single shoes.

You might also like to contact some of the charities that work in the developing world, such as Oxfam, as they may be able to put single shoes to good use for amputees in these parts of the world.

● *Sole Mates*, tel: 020 8524 2423

● *Limbless Association*, tel: 020 8487 6034 or visit: www.limbless-association.org

appropriately seated in his car seat on the flight because it gives him the necessary postural support. You may need a letter from your GP to confirm that it is in your son's best interests to be seated in this way.

This argument is worth trying. The contention that the use of a car seat is "not safe" may be overturned if the risk to your son is greater when he is not in it for a long-haul flight.

The general attitude of airlines towards wheelchair users can vary considerably, so unless you have found an airline you are comfortable with, it may be worth shopping around.

Tourism for All has information on which airlines are the most "friendly" for people with a range of impairments.

● *Tourism for All*, tel: 0845 124 9971 or visit: www.tourismforall.org.uk

Car without gas

I have a Renault Extra van with a Poynting wheelchair conversion, but I need a new petrol tank. It is a prefabricated tank and I am finding it impossible to find one or get one made. Any ideas?
Eddie, by email

I would suggest a number of things to you, assuming that you haven't tried them already.

Go back to the people who carried out your conversion and ask their advice. After all, a van without a petrol tank is not fit for the road.

Even if they cannot provide one themselves, they should be able to put you in

touch with someone who can resolve the problem.

Get in touch with Renault and see if they have any suggestions. Any main dealership should know where there are available parts for their vehicles.

If you are a member of any of the breakdown assistance organisations, such as the Automobile Association, you might like to seek their advice.

My final suggestion would be to contact Mobilise (an amalgamation of the Disabled Drivers' Association and Disabled Drivers' Motor Club) to see if they have any advice, or if they have heard of a similar situation before.

● *Mobilise*, tel: 01508 489 449 or visit: www.justwebs.co.uk/mobilise/Index.asp



Help at the end of the phone

DN's telephone counsellor Lin Berwick gives disabled people and carers advice and support on personal and spiritual problems. Disabled herself, Lin is a psychotherapeutic counsellor and Methodist local preacher, with a postgraduate diploma in homeopathic medicine. If you have something you need to discuss in confidence, talk to her on Mondays 6pm-10pm and Thursdays 1pm-5pm, tel: 01787 882 111.

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See

www.disabilitynow.org.uk

ASK THE READERS

Does anyone know of a bank that can provide an accessible bank account for someone with learning difficulties? One which provides bank statements with symbols, etc?

Symbols not the answer

I work as the manager of FAIR, an advice and information service for people with learning disabilities and carers in Edinburgh.

Two years ago I did some research into the problems that people have with banks. You can see the report on the FAIR website*. We did not find any examples of a bank that used symbols on statements, but in FAIR's experience the use of symbols can be mixed because there are several different systems in use across the country. Even in Edinburgh there are two or three systems in use.

* www.fairadvice.org.uk/money.htm

Margaret Hurcombe

Barclays booklet

Barclays Bank produces a booklet for people with learning difficulties, called *It's your money*. It is designed to answer common questions about banks and banking and has been produced in association with People First and the Employers' Forum on

Disability. As a member of the Employers' Forum, Barclays says it's committed to ensuring its services are accessible to all its customers. The booklet is available free*.

* For a copy, tel: 0800 400 100 Rachel Wilson

Give my bank a go

Try Lloyds TSB. The staff at my local branch are very helpful towards people with learning difficulties and I got to know them all individually. Maybe organise a meeting or call to talk to someone there who may help. Gee

NEXT MONTH'S QUESTION:

"I have a problem with the interior locks on disabled public toilets. If the door is locked, another person can enter if they have a RADAR key. There is no privacy. Has anyone else experienced this problem?"

Send your answers and your own questions to "Ask The Readers" at *Disability Now* at the usual address or email: editor@disabilitynow.org.uk



SIMON SAYS

Spicing up your sex life with a bit of experimentation could be the key to discovering true intimacy with your partner

As we approach Valentine's Day, our minds – if not other parts – turn to thoughts of love and romance.

But if you have already met your Valentine, is it just a case of getting more acquainted?

As disabled people, we do face physical limitations – aside from other people's attitudes. If you and your partner both have a disability, it may require a little more creativity when it comes to sexual encounters.

You must experiment to see what works and what doesn't. After all, experimentation and exploration can be fun and sexy. However, problems can arise which require a little more thought and discussion.

When talking about having sex, do we mean penetrative sex? It may be that penetration is important to you and it is

something that you really want to experience. But for some people it takes quite a lot of physical effort and painful positioning.

The gains may be outweighed by the costs. If you have worked out a way, it might only be an option to make love that way occasionally, and enjoy

'Don't forget that our whole body is covered in sensitive skin, so use your imagination'

yourselves in the many other exciting ways which don't involve penetration as a goal.

So, what positions can you try? The most often suggested position for relaxing sex is the "spoons" position, where you lie facing the back of your partner. This position allows easy rear entry.

The "missionary"

position – where the man is on top and the woman below – isn't as satisfying for many people.

Use cushions, pillows and other supports that you have around the house, or buy some special items on the internet.

Don't forget that our whole body is covered in sensitive skin, so use your imagination!

Have a look on the web, adapt things to suit your particular situation, communicate with your lover and share ideas. Make it fun and enjoy finding out about each other as well as yourself.

There are no special positions that work for all. The best way is the way that works for you and your lover.

Make the most of this Valentine's Day and try some things that you never have before. You never know what might happen. Happy Valentine's Day.

Send your relationship questions to "Simon says" at the usual postal address or email: editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

ICT and Assistive Technology for Independence

- a two day conference on May 8 & 9, in Oxfordshire.

This is the sixth annual conference hosted by HFT, which provides an update and launch of new products, demonstrating how assistive technology can support adults with learning disabilities and their carers. The conference will showcase examples from the TATE (Through Assistive Technology to Employment) project.

The programme, which is aimed at those with all levels of ICT knowledge, includes a choice of workshops giving an opportunity to see new software and hardware and try them out, as well as plenary sessions, vendor exhibitions and the opportunity to network. Chaired by Dr John Hegarty, Keele University.

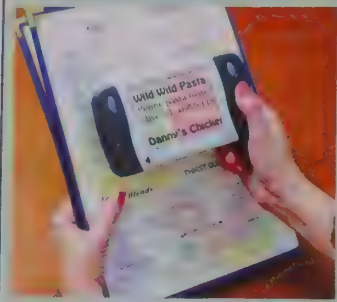
Conference costs are £450 (inc. VAT) and includes TWO nights accommodation, dinner on 7 & 8 May and lunch on 8 & 9 May.

Further details from
Katie Sayer,
Tel 01235 835507,
or email: katie.sayer@hft.org.uk



Bigger and better

From magnifying your bills to helping with locked doors, Bob Ross details some of the latest gadgets which could make your life easier



READING THE SMALL PRINT

What? The PICO pocket-sized video magnifier is convenient to use and makes reading the daily small print easy. Electricity bills, shopping lists, price tags, medication labels on pill bottles, menus and ingredient information on food are just some of the everyday things that the magnifier can make just that much easier to decipher. Print and photos can be magnified by between three and 11 times, and 5X magnification will enlarge newsprint to 0.4 inches high.

Easy-to-use controls include a one button on/off switch; a button to select colour, positive or negative text, or yellow on blue viewing modes; and a lighting control switch providing on/off and dimmer functions.

The magnifier comes with a rechargeable battery and AC adaptor, as well as a wrist strap and carrying case.

How much? £495. **Where?** Keytools, PO Box 700, Southampton SO17 1LQ, tel: 023 80584314 or visit www.keytools.co.uk

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ELITE CONVERSATION

What? The Panasonic bone conduction telephone transmits sound through the skull directly to the inner ear, allowing users with hearing impairments to hear callers more clearly. Bone-conducted sound bypasses the outer and middle ear, so sound transmission is much clearer, even in noisy environments.

The telephone also incorporates a large-button keypad, which aids users with limited dexterity or sight impairments.

How much? £129.99.

Where? Panasonic UK, Panasonic House, Willoughby Road, Bracknell, Berkshire RG12 8FP, tel: 08705 357357 or visit www.panasonic.co.uk



RAMPING IT UP

What? Medicare Technology has a new addition to its range of access ramps. The R007 folding access ramp is made of glass-reinforced plastic and has a colour-contrasting, anti-slip, high-traction surface. The ramp is lightweight, portable, folds in half for easy storage, and comes with a carrying handle, which enables it to be transported like a suitcase. It is suitable for use with wheelchairs and mobility scooters, and is also suitable for pedestrian use.

The ramp has a track width of 64cm, a weight of 13.5 kg and a safe weight load of 195kg.

How much? £450.

Where? Medicare Technology, Ainleys Industrial Estate, Elland, West Yorkshire HX5 9JP, tel: 01422 314488 or visit www.medicaretechnology.com



OPENING DOORS

What? Finding the front door lock and getting the key into the lock can sometimes prove to be a problem, particularly if you have a sight impairment or limited dexterity. The ERA Locca remote door locking system puts an end to the days of struggling with keys on the doorstep, without compromising on security. The door lock operates using a push button in conjunction with existing latch locks – so no expensive lock replacements are required.

A small operating unit is fitted to the inside of your home and connected to the existing door lock. A single push of the button will then operate the lock.

The Locca comes with features including a yellow-on-black single-push button fob for easy identification and use, a 50-metre operating range and wrist and neck straps.

How much? £149.

Where? ERA Products, Straight Road, Short Heath, Willenhall, West Midlands WV12 5RA, tel 01922 490000 or visit www.era-security.com



Bob Ross is helpline manager for the Disabled Living Foundation

What's on

Film

Running With Scissors is a comedy about Deirdre, a woman with mental health problems who divorces her alcoholic husband and sends her son Augusten to live with her therapist. The cast includes Gwyneth Paltrow and Alec Baldwin.

Babel documents simultaneous events in the lives of four groups of people across the globe, including Chieko (Rinko Kikuchi), a deaf student in Tokyo who struggles to cope with the death of her mother.

Theatre

Scottish Dance Theatre is touring between February and May with *Angels of Incidence*, a new show which features disabled dancers. Venues include: Dundee, Glasgow, Blackpool, Newbury, London and Bray in Ireland, beginning in Dundee on 22 February.

• Tel: 01382 342 600 or visit: www.scottishdancetheatre.com

Inclusive theatre company Graeae's latest production is Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, which will be at the Soho theatre in London to 3 February. The show explores the horror of war and the destruction of society. The play integrates sign language and audio description.

• Tel: 0870 429 6883, www.sohotheatre.com

Training

Scene Change is a new drama training programme from Graeae, open to young people aged 16-25 who have a physical or sensory impairment. Weekend taster workshops are being held around the UK.

• Contact Alex Bulmer, tel: 020 7700 2455, or email: alex@graeae.org

Exhibitions

Stephen Wiltshire is holding an exhibition of drawings and paintings at the Riverside Gallery in Richmond, London, to 11 March. The collection includes a 360-degree large-scale panorama of Tokyo and a panorama of Rome.

• Tel: 020 8831 6000 or visit: www.richmond.gov.uk/arts and www.stephenwiltshire.co.uk

Audio books

Gloomy winter evenings can be more enjoyable with a good audio book, especially when it's well-read.

Actor David Oyelowo (best known for his role in BBC's *Spooks*) is, for me, a welcome addition to the world of the spoken word.

His brilliant narration of John Le Carré's new novel *The Mission Song* ensured that I was engrossed by a compelling but characteristically complex story (Hodder and Stoughton, £14.99).

The more familiar voice of Janet McTeer, equally skilled at characterisation, does justice to *The Red Dablia*, the latest Lynda La Plante, which features detective Anna Travis (Simon and Schuster, £16.99).

Another crime novel, this time from the USA, is *The Cold Moon* by Jeffery Deaver (Hodder and Stoughton, £14.99). Kerry Shale brings to life another case for quadriplegic sleuth Lincoln Rhyme. Similarly, *The Thirteenth Tale*, Diane Setterfield's compelling mystery of family secrets and the magic of books, is not to be missed – not least because of another winning performance by Juliet Stevenson (Orion, £14.99).

Anton Lesser's rendition of *Sovereign* by C J Sansom, an intriguing tale which mixes fact with fiction in Henry VIII's England, is unsurprisingly first-class (Macmillan, £14.99).

For a purely factual account of the English monarchy, why not try *On Royalty*, written and inimitably read by Jeremy

JEREMY PAXMAN

On Royalty



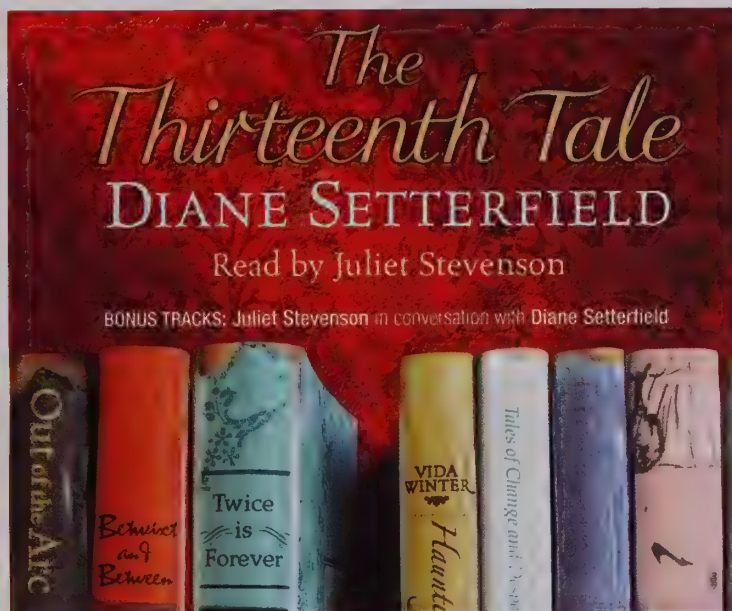
READ BY
JEREMY PAXMAN

Paxman (Penguin, £12.99).

It's worth noting that one of the *Newsnight* presenter's many interviewees, David Blunkett, now has his book *The Blunkett Tapes* out in audio form, narrated by Jim Norton (Bloomsbury, £16.99).

Finally, in time for Valentine's Day, there's *Classic Romance*, an apposite collection of stories for romantics everywhere, compiled by Helen Davies and introduced by Alex Jennings (Naxos, £14.99).

Vidar Hjordeng



JOHN LE CARRÉ THE MISSION SONG

Read by David Oyelowo



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For more what's on visit:
www.disabilitynow.org.uk

Publications

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has published a DVD titled *The Transporters*, aimed at helping children with autism to look at the human face and recognise emotions. The series features 15 five-minute episodes and is narrated by Stephen Fry. There is an accompanying booklet.

See www.transporters.tv, or contact the National Autistic Society (NAS), tel: 0845 070 4004, www.nas.org.uk

Working for Yourself Uncovered by Andi Robertson is the latest title in the Careers Uncovered series. The book gives information and advice on setting up a business. Robertson, who has Parkinson's disease, is also involved in Enterprise

South Devon's (ESD) Disabled Entrepreneur's Project. The project helps disabled people set up their own business. Trotman Publishing, £11.99. Tel: 020 8456 1160, www.trotman.co.uk

Social Firms UK, which aims to create jobs for disabled people through social firms, has published *Bringing Social Firms out of Public Authorities*, by Geoff Cox. The guide covers political and management support and staff issues such as pensions and the minimum wage. £30 to members, £60 to non-members. Tel: 01737 764 021, www.socialfirms.co.uk

Jessica Kingsley Publishers (JKP) has produced a CD

Rom called *ISPEEK at Home*, which includes more than 1,300 visual communication images aimed at children with autistic spectrum disorders. It covers situations around the home and beyond, and includes areas from feelings and facial expressions to health and hygiene (£23). Tel: 020 7833 2307, www.jkp.com

The Volunteer Centre in Tameside has produced a DVD titled *U Can 2*, about volunteering, written, produced and directed by volunteers, many of whom have personal experience of disability. Tel: 0161 339 2345, www.tamesidevb.org.uk

Fieldsman Trails has a range of maps, cards and pictures,

including clear view maps available in various formats, including large print, audio, tactile and Braille, and talking pictures. Tel: 01352 759 879, www.fieldsmanbookshop.co.uk

South Hams Access Group has produced an audio guide for the Totnes to Dartington "access for all" path. The guide has information on the area, including wildlife and folklore. Available from the Cider Press Centre in Dartington and the Tourist Information Centre in Totnes. Tel: 01752 880 403. Also available in Braille and large print. Or contact the RNIB transcription centre in Ivybridge, tel: 01752 690 092, email: ivytcsw@rnib.org.uk

The Transport and General Workers Union has produced a *Disability Rights at Work* pack, aimed at promoting equal opportunities and rights in the workplace. It includes a TUC guide to the law. Tel: 020 7611 2500, www.tgwu.org.uk

First Choice Housing Association has published *Living in Your Home*, a training guide and workbook aimed at increasing the ways in which tenants with learning difficulties can be informed about their rights and responsibilities. Tel: 02920 703 758, or download a free copy at www.firstchoicehousing.co.uk

What's on

The Birmingham Carers Centre is holding an information day on diabetes on Friday, 23 February, as part of a programme of events for carers, aimed at increasing awareness of disability issues. The event will feature representatives from health and social care organisations including Diabetes UK. 11-2pm, 3 Colmore Road, Birmingham. Tel: 0121 675 8170, www.birminghamcarers.org.uk

The Institute of Psychoanalysis in London is holding a series of events throughout 2007, including introductory lectures and film screenings. To find out more, tel: 020 7563 5017, www.psychoanalysis.org.uk

UP FOR GRABS: DECEMBER'S WINNERS

The winners of the £30 HMV vouchers in the December issue were: K Nicholson from the Isle of Skye and P Wilkinson from West Yorkshire.

The winner of the Triway tricycle from Logic Engineering Concepts was: A J Birch from London.

DN LINAGE

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Cars/vans/caravans

1994 VW CARAVELLE 2.4d wheelchair accessible motor caravan automatic part converted motor caravan, high top with 2 berths in roof. remote controlled underfloor Ricon lift and automatic sliding door, restraints, electric handbrake, hand controls, uprated steering, six-way power drivers seat easy transfers and swivel passenger seat. has £14000 worth of access equipment. Excellent condition, genuine reason for sale. ten months MOT. £7,500 now reduced to £5,500 to sell. Tel Paul: 07802 808 238. (Hemel Hempstead, Herts), more pics available.

RENAULT KANGOO 1.2, registered November 2003, air con, 5 doors. With Constables rear access conversion incl ramp and inertia belts, carries 5 including wheelchair. In excellent condition, 19k miles, only one owner from new, fsh, full year's MOT. £8,750 ono. Tel: 01797 260223 (East Sussex).

VAUXHALL ASTRA 1.6 auto, Y reg (2001), e/windows, air con and pas. Fitted with Elap electronic hand controls, fully working Autochair wheelchair roofbox. Only 29k miles and one owner from new, fsh, tax and MOT until March 2007. £5,250 ono. Tel: 07947 834674 (Lichfield, Staffs) or email: nillem1@yahoo.co.uk

MERCEDES VITO 110 CDI Traveliner 2.2, first registered June 99 (T reg), green, 70k miles, pas, auto. 3 front seats, 3 rear seats and room for wheelchair, electric side lift with sliding doors. Only 2 owners from new, fsh, full MOT, new tyres and alternator. £5,200 ono. Tel: 02920 755932 (Cardiff) or mobile: 07745 129482 or email: claire.l.hawkins@btinternet.com

SUZUKI WAGON R Plus 1.3, auto, yellow, W reg (2000), e/windows and e/mirrors, pas. With full Jubilee conversion, carries 5 people including wheelchair user. Only one user from new, 34k miles, full MOT. £4,295. Tel: 020 8586 4064 (Romford, Essex).

FORD TRANSIT, R reg, red, diesel, auto, e/windows and e/sunroof. Drive by wheelchair with rear ramp and RICON lift, automatic doors, fitted with 9-way Lodgeson's infra red system, automatic fire extinguisher. Seats 5 incl wheelchair driver - 3 in front and 2 in back. 25k miles, MOT until Aug 2007, fitted with digibox, in vgc, £9,500 ono. Tel: 01452 863767 (Glos) or 01452 537039.

VAUXHALL CORSA, AUTO, T reg, 24k miles, MOT. Autochair topbox, lightened steering, electric controlled driver's seat - horizontal and vertical. Easy relief hand brake, Bekker hand controls and foot guard. £2,000 ono. Tel: 01226 293111 (S.Yorks).

HONDA CR-V WEST One 51/Sept 2001, 47k miles, metallic blue, alloys, air con, CD player, recent full service. Including cam belt with full Carony Recaro seat system and widened door, MOT. £7,995.00. Tel: 01778 571202 (Lincolnshire) or email m.helm@tesco.net

PEUGEOT EXPERT 1.9, 2002, diesel, pas, e/windows and e/mirrors. Constables wheelchair conversion incl rear access via ramp, hoist. Carries 5 including wheelchair that fits between 2 rear seats with room for extra wheelchair at rear (second inertia belt fitted). Only 26k miles and 2 owners from new, fsh and full MOT. £7,200 ono. Tel: 01732 351686 (Tonbridge).

FIAT MULTIPLA 1.9 JTD, Nov 02, metallic blue, tints all round, diesel, e/windows and e/mirrors, pas, climate control, full body kit. Brotherwood conversion incl rear ramp and wheelchair space next to driver, 2 rear seats. Only one owner from new, 33k miles and full MOT, £12,000. Tel: 01277 811178 (Brentwood) or email: dcasey55@aol.com

VW CARAVELLE 2.4 GL, R reg (1997), diesel, red, e/windows and e/mirrors, sunroof, climate control. Wheelchair conversion by Invatravel incl Ricon side lift, carries 6 with wheelchair or 7 without (extra seat available). In excellent condition, only 44k miles, full MOT and tax, with fsh. £5,400 ono. Tel: 020 8841 5425 (Hayes, Middlesex) or email: tony@togem.fsnet.co.uk

NISSAN PRAIRIE 1.8, F 1988, 108.000 miles, petrol, blue, 5 door, MOT Aug 07, one year tax, good condition, radio/cassette, it is specially converted for wheelchair access by Brotherwood conversion, rear ramp. £1,200 ono. 01273-502040 (Brighton).

CHAIRMAN FIAT SCUDO 1.9D 1997 Gowrings conversion, regularly serviced, 69,000 miles, MOT (8 mths). Lowered floor. Carries 5 including wheelchair using rear dropdown ramp. £3,950. Tel: 020 8360 1688. Mob 07891 455 138.

VAUXHALL ZAFIRA 1.6 Club 02 reg, auto, e/windows, pas, air con, CD player. Hoist fitted for wheelchair/scooter, 7 seater. In excellent condition, only 32k miles, full MOT, fsh. £5,750 ono. Tel: 01723 363568 (Scarborough) or mobile: 07840 486279.

CHRYSLER GRAND VOYAGER 3.3LE, auto, bronze, R reg (1998), 77k miles, pas, e/windows and e/mirrors, 6-CD/radio, cruise control, mileage computer, e/driver's seat, lightly tinted windows, standard alloy wheels, Chrysler roof rack, fitted sill footboards, beige interior. Jubilee wheelchair conversion from new incl manual ramp and wheelchair fittings. Driver plus 3 full passenger seats and wheelchair room. Only 2 owners from new, very good condition, MOT expires Dec 07, £6,500 ono. Tel: 01656 871006 (S.Wales).

CHAIRMAN RENAULT KANGOO 1.6, auto, bought August 05, cherry red, air con with heat reflective windscreen, overhead aviation compartments, pas, e/mirrors and e/windows, CD player with fingertip remote control. Insurance approved engine immobiliser and Renault anti-intruder device. Gowrings conversion with additional seat, maximum capacity 5 people incl wheelchair. Only 1,100 miles, one owner from new, in immaculate condition, £11,900. Tel: 01582 769272 (Harpenden, Herts) or mob: 07980 255253.

CHAIRMAN VW CARAVELLE T4, 1997. 2.5 Petrol, 4 speed automatic, Power steering. ABS, MOT Aug 2007. Disabled tax class. Full and up to date service history. Only 59,000 miles from new with all old MOT's to prove. Electric windows and mirrors. Front and rear air conditioning and separate heater in the rear. 5 doors. 4 Captains seats. Sony stereo. Custom cab over carpet. Clear front indicators. Rear suspension lowers to aid wheelchair access. Ramp and tail gate are manually operated. Tie down clamps and seat belts for two wheelchair passengers. £4500 o.n.o. Tel: 01495 225199 or 07855 461 373. Email: ms101@tesco.net

2006 FIAT DUCATO 11 with wheelchair access, 4 Seats + 2 Wheelchairs, 2.3JTD Turbo Diesel SWB Minibus by Advanced Minibus.co.uk, Vision Ramp, Q'straint QRT-Deluxe Wheelchair Restraints, ABS, PAS, Twin Side Doors, Heated Rear Windows, Alarm with remote C/Locking, E/Windows & Mirrors, Radio CD, Safe-T-Bar rear bumper, Mileage just 1,500, Long Remainder of 2/3yrs Warranties, Virtually as New, £14,750 ono. (No VAT) Tel: 07984 149493 (Nottingham) or Email: steve@ok2talk.co.uk

GOWRINGS MAX CARSEAT, used in a Daihatsu Grand Move. Swivels 180 degrees. Complete with armrests. Hardly used, cost £1,725, asking £350 ono. Tel: 01752 670607 (Plymouth) or email: jernieh@onetel.com

RENAULT EXTRA, CARRIES wheelchair or scooter plus passenger and one seat. 1994, MOT July 2007, 42k miles, rear ramp bypass on clutch. Offers. Tel: 01733 315227 (Peterborough).

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PEARL 4-WHEEL ELECTRIC scooter. Virtually new, just over a year old. Cost nearly £1,000, only used twice and has been stored in garage since. £500. Tel: 0161 973 5626 (Manchester) or 07776 196500.

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Cont'd see pg 51

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KIA SEDONA 2.9 LTR TURBO DIESEL Registered: 03/12/02, Metallic green, 1 owner, Excellent Condition, 5 speed manual, 18,000 miles, 5 door, A.B.S, Air Bag, Air conditioning, Electric Mirrors, Electric reels, Electric windows, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Immaculate condition inside and out, Lowered rear floor for wheelchair access, Power Steering, Rear Saloon Heating/Cooling System, Remote Central Locking, Service History, Two rear saloon passenger seats. **£12,950**

RENAULT TRAFIC SWB 1.9DCI Registered: 01/07/05, Metallic Silver, 4 seats, 1 owner, Excellent Condition, Manual, 20,200 miles, Air conditioning, ABS, Balance of manufactures Warranty, Electric Mirrors, Electric windows, Electric winch, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Power Steering, Remote Central Locking, Service History, Single front passenger seat, Two rear saloon passenger seats. **£13,495**

MERCEDES BENZ VITO 110 CDI 2.2 LTR DIESEL Turquoise, 4 seats, 1 owner, Automatic, 24,000 miles, 5 door, Electric handbrake, Six way drivers seatbase, Adapted disabled vehicle, Air Bag, Electric Mirrors, Electric windows, Power Steering, RICON CLEARWAY electric wheelchair lift, Twin Side Doors, Two rear saloon passenger seats. **£12,750**

FIAT SCUDO COMBI MONTANA 2.0 JTD Date first registered: 05/04/03, Blue, 3 seats, Condition: Good, 5 speed manual, 30,000 miles, 5 door, Air conditioning, Electric Mirrors, Electric reels, Electric windows, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Lowered rear floor for wheelchair access, Power Steering, Remote Central Locking, Twin Side Doors. **£9,995**

MERCEDES BENZ SPRINTER 3 SERIES SWB 2.2 CDI 4 seats, Automatic Transmission, Remote control rear door and lift operation, Ricon lift, Electric wheelchair lockdown, Six Way powered drivers seat. **£14,000**

RENAULT MASTER SWB 2.2 DCI DIESEL Date registered: 12/07/01, Silver, 6 seats, 5 speed manual, 25,000 miles, Could take 2 wheelchairs, Immaculate condition inside and out, Non-Slip Flooring, Power Steering, Radio/cassette player, Remote Central Locking, RICON CLEARWAY electric wheelchair lift, Side load door, Twin front passenger seat, Three removable rear saloon seats. **£9,600**

FIAT SCUDO COMBI MONTANA 2.0 JTD Date registered: 05/04/03, Blue, 3 seats, 5 speed manual, 30,000 miles, 5 door, Air conditioning, Electric Mirrors, Electric reels, Electric windows, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Lowered rear floor for wheelchair access, One rear saloon seat, Power Steering, Radio/cassette player, Remote Central Locking, Service History, Twin Side Doors. **£9,995**

FIAT DOBLO ASPEN 1.9D SX Registered: 13/08/03, Red, 3 seats, Manual, 29,000 miles, 5 door, Air Bag, Electric reels, Electric windows, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Lowered rear floor for wheelchair access, One rear saloon seat, Power Steering, Remote Central Locking, Service History, Twin Side Doors. **Cost: £9,195**

FIAT DOBLO ASPEN 1.9JTD Registered: 10/05/05, Metallic Blue, 4 seats, As new, Manual, 19,500 miles, Top of the range, 5 door, Air Bag, Air conditioning, Alloy wheels, Balance of manufactures Warranty, Electric Mirrors, Electric reels, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Lowered rear floor for wheelchair access, Power Steering, Remote Central Locking, Two rear saloon passenger seats, A.B.S. **Cost: £11,995**

VOLKSWAGEN TRANSPORTER T4 SWB 2.5 TDI Registered: 08/05/03, Blue, 5 seats, Manual, 32,000 miles, Air Bag, Cruise control, Electric windows, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Power Steering, Remote Central Locking, Service History, Twin front passenger seat, Two rear saloon passenger seats. **Cost: £9,750**

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53	Renault New Traffic DC. 4 Seats, Fold out Ramp. Low miles	£12995
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53	Toyota Diesel Powerbus - Rear Lift & Seats -	£14995
03	Citreon Dispatch 1.9D. Lowered floor. Ramp . Winch. 3 Seats	£11495
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53	Renault Kangoo 16v . Low Floor. Lowering Suspension. 3 Seats	£11495
V	Mercedes Benz V Class Auto . Underfloor Lift. Powered Transfer Seat	£20,995
N	Ford Transit Drive From the Wheelchair, Over £55000 when new -	£6995
52	Chrysler Grand Voyager Drive From Wheelchair Entervan Luxury MPV	£31995
R	Renault Trafic 1.9D Rear Ramp. 3 Seats. Super Condition.	£4495
56	Fiat Doblo High Roof. Wheelchair Accessible. Delivery Mileage Only.	£8995

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SPECIALIST RESPITE CARE BREAKS

For disabled people

Blackpool Holiday Centre

2nd – 8th June 2007 (Sat – Fri)

From £275 per person, full board.

Child prices (under 12) available on request

South Downs Holiday Village, Nr Chichester, Sussex

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From £195 per person full board (adults only)

Prices include three meals a day, VAT and cancellation/liability. Entertainment every evening including music, competitions. Wide range of daytime activities inc. handcrafts and beauty. Visits to local places of interest. Trained and experienced staff. Medical and nursing advice if required. Further information and bookings

Call 020 8390 9752 and quote DN0207

Or write to Rosemary McIntyre MBE, Holidays with Help, 4 Pebblecombe, Adelaide Road, Surbiton, KT6 4LL.

Email: holidays.with.help@lineone.net Web: www.holidayswithhelp.org.uk



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- Hoists in the bathrooms of three cottages.
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- For an internal view of any cottage please visit our website @ www.mellwatersbarn.co.uk

Rates: £200 to £270 per cottage per week, depending on size of cottage and season. Short breaks also available. Prices include linen, heating, electricity etc. your only cost is food.

Telephone: 01833 628181 • Fax: 01833 628020

Email: mellwatersbarn@aol.com • Website: www.mellwatersbarn.co.uk

• Accommodation

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STERLING CLASSIC ELECTRIC scooter, 4 wheel, excellent condition, little used, £450. Tel: 01363 774228 (Devon).

SHOPRIDER SOVEREIGN ELECTRIC 4-wheel scooter. Brand new, never been used. Genuine reason for sale, bought about 2 months' ago, full year's warranty and insurance. Price includes protective cover, with basket, rear/front lights and indicators. £600 ono. Tel: 020 7240 6927 (Central London).

Household & Families

WALK-IN PREMIER bath, as new, 1 year old, right hand opening, white, with panels, taps and thermostat. £800. Free delivery within 50 miles. Tel: 01189 331839 (Reading) or mob: 07958 107013.

SANO LIFTKAR PT Uni 130. Never used. Roll-on/roll-off wheelchair stair climber, 130kg carrying capacity. Universal wheelchair carrying. Never used, just unpacked. Perfect for office buildings. Item was £3295 12 months ago. All offers considered. http://www.liftkarpt.com/pt_uni.shtml for more info. Tel James: 0800 454238 (Biggin Hill, Kent). Trade

• Recruitment (on page 51 to 55)



foviance

Wanted: Website testers

Foviance is a company which helps organisations measure, analyse and enhance the online experience they deliver to their customers. Our customers include travel companies, retailers, banks, insurers and the media.

We are currently recruiting disabled testers for a number of major projects in 2007. We are looking for web users whose disability affects the way in which they access the web, with any level of online experience, to participate.

Taking part is simple. It typically involves coming to our offices in London (or your home, office or university, if this is not possible), completing a number of tasks on a website and then discussing your opinion and use of the site. The sessions generally last between 1-2 hours and we pay competitive rates for your time (usually £50-£75).

If you are interested in taking part, please give us your details by completing our online registration form http://www.foviance.com/news211206.asp

• Recruitment (on page 51 to 55)

social care
institute for excellence


Chief Executive

London £Six-figure package

At any one time, up to 1.5 million men, women and children in society rely on social care services whose care needs are many and varied. By championing good practice across the sector in a way that empowers service users, our role is to ensure that every one of those needs is met.

We've been working to improve social care in the UK since 2001. Our publications and resources have become vital reference tools for practitioners, researchers, policymakers and service users themselves.

As our new Chief Executive, your mission will be to spread the word throughout the sector and beyond. In order to drive our contribution to the national agenda and put service users at the heart of good practice, you should already be a high-profile figure in social care. You're definitely an adept public speaker who's trusted and respected throughout the sector and have the passion and credibility to help make social care work.

For more information visit www.improvingocialcare.co.uk For a confidential discussion call John Schless on 020 7017 0950 or David Fielding on 020 7017 0920. Closing date for applications is 29 January 2007. Ref: SCIE004

Caxton House, 2 Farringdon Road London EC1M 3HN
Member of the Pinnacle Public Services Group

rockpools



PA to Group Chief Executive

25 flexible hours pw
Salary range £16,051 - £19,986

Catalyst Housing Group Ltd provides support services, strategic leadership, and regulation to four housing associations and three care agencies, responsible for more than 15,000 affordable homes in London and the South East.

We are an equal opportunities employer committed to diversity

A charitable housing association

Supporting the Group Chief Executive, your main duty will be to ensure all he has to worry about are the things that could make a real difference to the way the Catalyst Group operates. You will be responsible for everything else that comes his way; either passing it on to relevant people to deal with, or taking responsibility for it yourself. With everything from diary arrangements to correspondence to preparing Board papers, that's a lot of responsibility. But the real appeal is the scope to get involved in so much more.

Excellent administration skills or experience of working as a PA for a Senior Manager are essential to this role. Prioritising work to meet deadlines will be second nature, as will liaising with a diverse group of people both within and outside of the Group.

To apply, please complete an application form at www.chg.org.uk/careers

Closing date: 31 January 2007

Catalyst
Housing Group



We're Supporting
AGE POSITIVE

• Courses

Are you unemployed? Working part time?

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if you require assistance and advice in applying
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are running 2 day workshops.

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please contact Brent in2 Work on

0208 937 6520

and quote 'Working 4 West London Workshops'



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to remember...
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Consultant!

babel
disability access consultants

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(£260 +VAT for 1 Module, £320+VAT for 2 Modules)

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For full details of our vacancies visit: www.liv.ac.uk/university/jobs.html

email: jobs@liv.ac.uk or call 0151 794 2210 (24hr answer phone)



• Recruitment (on page 51 to 55)

mobilise

Director of Policy and Campaigns £35,000 - £38,000 Norwich area

Mobilise Organisation is looking for an experienced and enterprising individual to run its policy and campaigning unit. This new position is responsible for developing policy and a range of services to meet the needs of disabled people whose disability severely affects their mobility.

The Director of Policy and Campaigns will build on the successes of the Disabled Drivers' Motor Club and the Disabled Drivers' Association, which merged to form Mobilise Organisation in 2005.

This is a challenging and varied role which will include policy development and strategic planning, campaigning, representation, development of member services, and sourcing new fundraising initiatives to support the campaigning side of the charity.

The Director of Policy and Campaigns will be responsible to the National Chairman, and lead a small team of Information Officers. Strong people management skills and strong communication skills will be essential as the job holder will be working with senior figures, including Government ministers and civil servants.

We are looking for a disabled person to fill this position.

Although based at our pleasant rural headquarters in Ashwellthorpe, near Norwich, this post requires some travel throughout the UK. Effective flexible working would be considered.

An information pack is available from our office. Please telephone 01508 489449 and ask for the information pack, or email us at admin@mobilise.info

We will not consider CVs or enquiries from agencies. Closing date 21 February 2007.

Registered Charity No. 1111826



Wanted Board Member

Ambitious, competitive and genuinely customer focussed, we take a commercial approach to everything we do. It's why we're different and it's what has made us one of the South East's biggest Housing Groups.

Board Member Staines

With over 15,000 homes throughout the Home Counties and beyond, A2 Housing Group is one of the leading providers of low cost and affordable housing in the South of England. We are currently seeking a new Board Member.

We want our Board Members to understand the issues that matter to our residents. Many of our residents live with disabilities, but at present they are underrepresented at Board level. For this reason we are particularly interested in meeting candidates with a sound knowledge of disability-related issues.

Have you got the skills we are looking for? You will need to demonstrate:

- An understanding of the social housing sector
- A commitment to sustaining high levels of service delivery to our residents
- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills

Board Members receive an annual remuneration of £3,000. For a description of the Board Member's responsibilities and further information about A2 Housing Group, contact Joanne Kehoe, Assistant Company Secretary, on 0845 408 6759 or Joanne.kehoe@a2hg.co.uk

Closing date: Friday 2nd March 2007.

No agencies please.

www.a2hg.co.uk

One team,
hundreds of Individuals



Vacancy

Director of Services

Salary – £35,000 for 37 hours per week

The post is to manage and develop the organisation which demonstrates products and equipment for disabled people, reporting to the Board of Directors. Responsible for strategic and operational development following a period of change as the organisation moves from being a charity to becoming a Community Interest Company. Key to the role is marketing and business development for trading to ensure the financial stability of the Centre in the future.

Closing date for applications – Monday 5th February 2007.

For an application pack contact Sara Burgess, Director of Services – sara.burgess@dlcbristol.org

Or at the address below

The Vassall Centre, Gill Avenue, Fishponds, Bristol BS16 2QQ

Tel: 0117 9653651. Fax: 0117 9653652.

Email: info@dlcbristol.org

Website: www.dlcbristol.org

Community Interest Company no. 2848685

DEADLINE

Disability Now

March 2007

published 24 February.

Classified deadlines:

Booking: 9 February.

Copy: 13 February.

DN EXTRA

February 2007

published 10 February.

Classified deadlines:

Booking and Copy:

31 January.

WARNING – We have been warned about a scam involving people from overseas who say they want to buy a product and who offer to pay using cheques, Western Union money transfers and certified cheques. Although no DN readers to our knowledge have been hit by this, please be particularly wary of accepting cheques from overseas. For more information, visit the Metropolitan Police website.

• Services

BIRKDALE PAEDIATRIC & ADULT NEURO CLINIC



Advice and treatment from newborn babies to adults.

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web: www.neuro-physio.co.uk tel: 0208 998 9403



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Working in partnership with the four South Yorkshire District Councils of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield, local public transport operators and many South Yorkshire organisations, the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive is responsible for securing and promoting the best possible public transport network for the South Yorkshire community.

Through our commitment to providing equal opportunities we intend to be an organisation that embraces and encourages diversity and is positive about employing disabled people.

All vacancies are advertised on our website at: www.sypte.co.uk and within local newspapers, alternatively you can call the Human Resources Department on 0114 2211218 for information.

Benefits include a flexible working hours scheme, 26 days holiday per year, a company final salary based pension scheme and a free countywide TravelMaster providing unlimited bus, tram and rail travel throughout South Yorkshire.



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Centre of Excellence



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It's an exciting time for East Thames Group working in east London and Essex – our key areas of operation. With a focus on the Thames Gateway and the Olympics we are committed to more than double in size by the year 2012.



business for neighbourhoods



Come together.

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www.east-thames.co.uk

We are an equal opportunities employer.



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County Council

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Every single day, we make a real and measurable impact upon the quality of life of over 550,000 people. It's a big challenge and we need to ensure we have a workforce that is as diverse and creative as the community we serve.

We are constantly striving to be the best employer that we can, with a passionate commitment to personal learning and development, flexible working and a work culture where individuality and imagination are valued. If you're looking for a new angle on life and work, then the answer's to be found at Cambridgeshire County Council.

For current opportunities, please visit www.jobsincambbs.com



Life from every angle

 Stonewall

www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk

MARKFIELD



Join a dynamic organisation promoting rights, independence, choice and inclusion for Disabled people and their families.

SERVICES MANAGER

£29,871-£32,493 inc OLV

PART TIME PLAY/YOUTH WORKERS £10.10/hr

PART TIME SUPPORT WORKER £10.10/hr

We are looking for a highly motivated manager, and part time workers to manage and develop our play, leisure, and recreation services for children and adults. Your challenge will be to ensure diverse services which encourage Disabled people to take an active role in their community. You will involve Disabled people in planning and running services, and design them around their needs, choices and aspirations.

The Services Manager will need proven experience in personnel and services management. As Ofsted Registered Manager you will need a qualification in childcare/play or related at minimum NVQ level 3. Play/Youth Workers and Support Workers will need minimum NVQ level 2 and 1 year experience in a relevant field. Some work experience must have been with Disabled people.

OFFICE AND FINANCE MANAGER

£29,871-£32,493 inc OLW

We are looking for a skilled manager to develop office and finance systems which support delivery of high quality services. You will need proven experience of developing and maintaining office systems; and in managing personnel and finances.

Closing date for all posts: 1st Feb 5pm

For an application pack contact us giving your details, the job title and where you saw the advert. Phone **020 8800 4134 ext 221** or email **reception@markfield.org.uk**

DN next month

All the best news, views, jobs and offers. Available 24 February

HOT SPOT: DN hears about the challenges and barriers faced by disabled people in the Middle East.

POOR START: The Disability Rights Commission launches its Disability Agenda, looking at what the government needs to do to tackle poverty.

PICTURE PERFECT: We review a new exhibition of drawings and paintings by the artist Stephen Wiltshire.

• Recruitment (on page 51 to 55)

The London Borough of Croydon is lead partner in the London Development Agency (LDA) funded Opportunities Programme which covers 9 South London Boroughs. It has received funding to set up the Opportunities Community Interest Company (CIC) that will be used as the vehicle to provide disability advice and consultancy services to employers across the catchment area of the project.

Office Manager

Two Year Fixed Term Contract
Salary £25-30k (Dependent upon experience)

The Office Manager will be required to provide full support to Chief Executive and office staff. Duties will include; Maintaining administrative and office systems including managing correspondence, word processing, filing, incoming and outgoing mail, mail merges, email and telephone messages. Also organise meetings and conferences as required.

Maintaining systems and procedures i.e. telephone systems, e-mail/internet connections, office furniture, office consumables contracts etc.

You will have a high degree of organisational ability and attention to detail, with a precise and accurate working style. You will be a self-starter, able to work unsupervised and on own initiative with the ability to prioritise and multi-task. You will require a high level of ICT skills. You will have proven interpersonal skills, including tact and discretion and must be a team player who is willing to pitch in to get the job done.

Chief Executive – Opportunities CIC

Two Year Fixed Term Contract
Salary: commensurate with experience

The Board of this newly formed CIC is looking for a motivated, strategic forward thinking Chief Executive Officer. This role will allow you to lead, manage and develop the organisation, ensuring continued achievement whilst establishing clear vision, strong profile and sustained growth by generating income. We will also look to you to build and maintain effective relationships with a multitude of private, public and community sector organisations.

As Chief Executive, you will lead the development and implementation of the company business plan, oversee and ensure the delivery of a range of disability related targeted services in the private sector.

You will work to develop the company's role as an authoritative and respected regional body, recognised for providing real value centred around disability to the London business community. Ideally you will have both private and public sector experience, a clear knowledge of both cultures and exceptional influencing skills as well as excellent knowledge of disability related issues (including the social model of disability) and experience in order to rise to the challenge of changing organisational cultures.

Disability Business Advisers

Two Year Fixed Term Contract
Salary: £30-35k (Dependent upon experience)

The Business Adviser role will deliver face-to-face disability focused consultancy advice and guidance services to private sector organisations, identifying gaps in relation to their disability policies and procedures and addressing those gaps.

A major element of this role will be to generate leads and develop new business opportunities. It is essential that you have a strong background in a business development, sales or marketing role, preferably gained from within the private sector.

You will ideally have experience in the disability sector; however, training could be available for the right candidate. You should be familiar with the Disability Discrimination Act and its impact on small to medium sized businesses and you will need to be confident in advising businesses in this area.

You will be well presented with sound business acumen and a flare for creative commercial projects. You should be very highly motivated and be able to work to clear and established delivery targets.

Closing date: **31st January 2007**. Please email your CV and covering letter to: Opportunities.CIC@Erinaceous.com

For further information or if you would like an informal discussion about these positions, please contact: Moira Skinner or Scott Nixon via **0208 760 5768 ext 61962** or e-mail via tracey.pearson@croydon.gov.uk

The Opportunities CIC is an equal opportunities employer.

Make your next role as important as ours.

DFID, the Department for International Development: leading the British government's fight against world poverty.

We offer opportunities in our headquarters in London and East Kilbride – but also in many developing countries, with staff based in DFID offices plus British Embassies and High Commissions around the world. We have roles for leaders; professionals; specialists; managers; graduates and administrators.

DFID is an equal opportunities employer and selection is on merit. Applications are welcomed from all parts of the community and we actively encourage interest from women, ethnic minority groups and those with a disability. We will make any reasonable adjustments should they be required. Candidates should be UK Nationals, nationals of a member state of the European Economic Area (EEA) or Commonwealth citizens with the right to work in the UK.

You can find out more about us, and our work, on our website www.dfid.gov.uk. You'll also find information about specific vacancies, opportunities, and an electronic application on the site.



DFID

Department for International Development

www.dfid.gov.uk

SEND US YOUR SMALLS... and make a big impression. Small ads in *DN* reach over 60,000 people for just £9 a line. All small ads must be paid for in advance. If you want to advertise, please use the form provided. Send it with a cheque for the total to *Disability Now*, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW.

STREETS ALIVE

Streets Alive is a theatre company for young people between 16 and 25 who are homeless or at risk. We are looking for a dynamic and experienced **Outreach and Development Tutor** to devise and lead our workshop programme. This post is funded by the Homelessness Directorate.

Salary: £23,000 For application pack, please send email: info@streetsalive.org.uk or an A4 SAE (44p) to **Streets Alive, 3-5 Lambeth Road, London SE1 7DQ.**
Deadline 12 February 2007.
Interview week 26 March 2007.

Streets Alive is committed to equality of opportunity.
Registered charity: 1082179

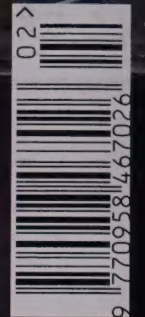


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